



PS3
PlayStation 3

PSP
PlayStation Portable

PlayStation 2

PlayStation Network

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - Australia

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100% Australian Content

RESIDENT EVIL:
**OPERATION
RACCOON CITY**
Why it'll blow your brains out!

FIRST PLAY! ▶

**SPEC OPS:
THE LINE**
Sun, sand and
sadistic slaughter

MULTI MADNESS! ▶

**GOTHAM CITY
IMPOSTORS**
Batman meets killer
cosplayers!

HANDS ON!

SYNDICATE

THE FUTURE OF SHOOTERS
HACKED WIDE OPEN!

+
TEKKEN HYBRID
NINJA GAIDEN III
SLY COOPER:
THIEVES IN TIME
GAME OF
THRONES
AND MORE!

IN DEPTH!

PREY 2
Sleeper hit exposed!

CATHERINE
Sexy puzzler scored

PRO
GUIDE:
MW3
SPEC OPS
MODE
SMASHED!



ESSENTIAL GUIDE! CO-OPTIMAL GAMING HOW TO BUDDY UP LIKE A BOSS



YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED LIKE THIS

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PS VITA
PlayStation Vita

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OUT FEBRUARY 23RD



The biggest and most immersive games are coming to PS Vita™, packed with innovative new ways to play.

This February, experience games like Uncharted: Golden Abyss™, Wipeout®2048 and ModNation™ Racers Road Trip like never before, with more of your favourites coming soon.

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SONY
make.believe

► COVER STORY

SYNDICATE

In the future we're more connected than you'd ever imagine. We get our hands all over the brand new shooter everyone's going to want to log in to.

p56



64 No Place Like Home

Three years following its PSN debut, we go back Home again to see what's changed... and what hasn't.



50 Co-Optimal Gaming

Got friends? Like fun? Then you need this: our comprehensive guide to kick-arse co-op games on PS3. (Crazed loners need not apply.)

► ON THE COVER

32 Spec Ops: The Line

Enter the heart of darkness with this gritty military shooter.

36 Operation Raccoon City

Resident Evil gets a squad shooter makeover.

42 Prey 2

Ever wanted to be Boba Fett? Well here's your chance. Sort of.

74 Catherine

Sex, psychosis, and sheep – what else do you need?

84 MW3 Spec Ops Guide

Go from fragbait to elite with our complete how-to.



40 Gotham City Impostors

Cosplay gets extreme when vigilantes and crackpots clash on the streets of Gotham City. Hockey pads optional.



70 Tekken Hybrid

It's three things in one, but do an 11-year-old game, a demo and a movie deserve your time? Read on!



16 Top 10

There are moments we'd all like to forget, and we've found a bunch that even the best devs cringe over



► INSIDER

In Short 9
All the essential news nuggets delivered as one tasty column.

Interview 10
Wayne Cline tells us everything about uDraw.

In Your Face 11
A battle over whether *Call of Duty* needs to change.

In Reality 12
This is the part where weapons or war can aim for themselves.

Interview 14
David Longo speaks to us about *Gotham City Imposters*.

In Focus 15
A new shooter from one of the minds behind *Half Life 2*.

Top Ten 16
Bad games by great developers. You will be surprised!

Insane 17
Visual gaming satire that you'll want to flock to.

Around the World 18
Gaming news and events from the far reaches of the globe.

◀ Page 36
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City
Play as the bad guys in this backstory to *Resident Evil 2* and 3

Calendar 19
A month of essential activities and releases.

Release Schedule 20
An up-to-date list of all upcoming and recently-released PS3 titles.

Opinion: Dan Staines 22
Politics in a land of the dragonborn.

Opinion: Paul Taylor 24
Time is limited, and one guy wants a shortcut to all the good stuff.

Opinion: Angry Sackboy 26
Why the people who think they have it tough don't know a thing.

Inbox 28
Your thoughts, letters, and feedback from the web and email.

► REGULAR

Internet 82
News, online reviews and DLC roundup.

Insight 84
In-depth tips on how to take your game to the next level.

Intermission 88
DVD, Blu-ray, PlayStation Store and cinema reviews.

Index 92
Your essential guide to the very best – and worst – games out there.

► FEATURES

Co-optimal Gaming 50
How to make gaming the other great thing to do with two (or more) people.

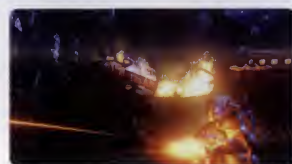
Agent of Change 56
We get our hands on the shooter that'll blow a hole in the future.

► PREVIEWS

Spec Ops: The Line 32

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City 36

Gotham City Imposters 40



Prey 2 42

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time 44

Ninja Gaiden III 46

Binary Domain 47

Game of Thrones 48

► REVIEWS

Tekken Hybrid 70



Metal Gear Solid HD Collection 72

Catherine 74

Hydrophobia: Prophecy 75

King of Fighters XIII 76

Jurassic Park: The Game 77



NCIS: The Game 78

Medieval Moves 80

Start the Party! Save the World 80

PUMA After Hours Athletes 81

Move Fitness 81

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Meet the team

**Paul Taylor****Deputy Editor**

Batman, Drake and the dragonborn crew and I are about to become the very best of friends.

Playing: Tekken Hybrid

Wanting: Syndicate

**Stephanie Goh****Art Director**

This Christmas I'm spending the holiday break parked on the couch in front of the TV.

Playing: Uncharted 3

Wanting: Gotham City Impostors

**Dan Staines****Acting Senior Writer**

For Christmas I have asked for a custom-made feed bag that I can affix to my face while playing Skyrim.

Playing: Skyrim

Wanting: Mass Effect 3

**James Cottee****Contributor**

Currently maxing out all the skills in Skyrim, even the worthless ones. I simply must have all those perks...

Playing: Skyrim

Wanting: Dragon's Crown

**James Ellis****Contributor**

The 50+ level freaks have broken me! I need to pry out BF3, light some candles, and go to a hippy retreat!

Playing: BF3

Wanting: Hitman Absolution

**Nathan Lawrence****Contributor**

I'm planning the kind of holiday that involves a whole lot of gaming and not much else. Oh yeahhh.

Playing: Uncharted 3

Wanting: Syndicate

**Dave Kozicki****Contributor**

Cracking skulls in Arkham City decked in The Dark Knight Returns skin is almost better than sex... almost.

Playing: Crysis

Wanting: Syndicate

**Toby McCasker****Contributor**

I've since worked out that if you noob-tube a guy just right in BF3, his corpse will beam straight up into the air. Rad.

Playing: Battlefield 3

Wanting: Sulkoden

**Angry Sackboy****Contributor**

My Christmas? Spent relaxing on my front porch. Rocking chair. Beer. Shotgun. You'd best keep on driving

Playing: Skyrim

Wanting: Bioshock Infinite

Editorial



The HD remakes of the PS2 *Metal Gear* games highlighted two things for me, 1. my mind used to be awesome at filling in missing details, and 2. Kojima spent way too much processor power rendering Snake's shrink-wrapped buns of steel. This is an article about the first thing.

When I played *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* back in 2003 I must have been skipping through a Willy Wonka world of pure imagination. To my

Neanderthal brain that tanker level was positively oozing with detail (Wot?! Me can shoot individual pans and vegetables? Ug-gasm!). Also, while the storm limited my visibility, I fancied the ship was enveloped in a New York City just beyond my reach.

But the cold, hard, glistening buttocks of reality is, there was so much less to the eye here. The shootable objects were few in variance, far between and heavily cloned. There was no Big Apple, just a dark silhouette bitmap lazily scrolling 'past' my stationary boat.

Laid bare in HD on a TV bigger than Tasmania, the memories I have from the PS2 era are now papier-mâché scams. For all I know, Snake didn't even have eyebrows textured on under his headband. I'm now left to wonder what eight years of man-worshipping a dude with no eyebrows and a 'butt that won't quit' says about me.

I kid, of course. In reality I evaluate older games like the teens from *American Pie* rate Stifler's mum. Resolutions will sag and textures show stretch marks; good fun defies age.

However, it does make one wonder when – not 'if' – what's blowing our mind today will look like a high school project zeta build. My time capsule theory is this: the wackier the premise and the more exaggerated the art design, the more milf – or in this case, 'gilp' – that title will appear later.

This PS3 era we're in is much too preoccupied with replicating realism that can't be fully reproduced, and thus is cursed with a use by date. We could do with a few more whimsical, artsy interpretations of the world – stuff like *Borderlands* or *Gotham City Impostors*. These will be the games our future eyes will better accept as timeless.

Mark my words, if artists today continue to squander their creativity on making 'not quite' photo-realistic worlds and asses, we'll look back on this generation and see nothing but cracks.

Adam Mathew**Editor**

Playing: Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Wanting: Gotham City Impostors

SPEAK WITH US!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:



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Question: what is the gift that keeps on giving the whole year round? Love? Wrong. A scratch-and-sniff calendar of celebrity crotches? No. Please stop abusing our rhetorical system.

The answer we were looking for is: an OPS subscription! Think about it, every issue – cheaper – delivered to your door via magic

TURN TO PAGE 32

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This Month

- 10 Interview
Wayne Cline
- 11 In Your Face
MW3 needs to innovate
- 12 In Reality
Smart guns
- 13 In Focus
Dragon's Crown
- 14 Interview
David Longo
- 15 In Focus
Dishonored
- 16 Top Ten
Crap games, rad devs
- 17 Insane
Gaming satire
- 18 Around the World
Global gaming snippets
- 19 Calendar
This month and beyond
- 20 Release Schedule
The big list
- 22 Opinion
Dan Staines
- 24 Opinion
Paul Taylor
- 26 Opinion
Sackboy

Vita launch line-up revealed

Uncharted, WipEout, and MotorStorm
star in killler first-party spread

Sony Computer Entertainment has announced its first-party launch line-up for the PlayStation Vita, and it is quite an impressive selection indeed.

Along with big names like *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, *WipEout 2048*, and *MotorStorm RC* are stylish black-and-white puzzler *Escape Plan*, AR-enhanced brawler *Reality Fighters*, cutesy mini-game compilation *Little Deviants*, and more. A definitive list of third-party launch titles is yet to be announced, though we do know that Namco Bandai's *Touch My Katamari* (snigger!) and *Ridge Racer* will both be available, while portable versions of Codemasters' *F1 2011* and EA's

FIFA 12 are also expected.

For the sake of completeness, and because we love you, here's the full list of Sony published titles that will be available when the Vita launches on February 23:

- *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* (SCE Bend)
- *WipEout 2048* (SCE Liverpool)
- *Reality Fighters* (Novarama)
- *Little Deviants* (BigBig Studios)
- *ModNation Racers: Road Trip* (SCE San Diego)
- *Everybody's Golf* (Clap Hanz)
- *Escape Plan* (Fun Bits Interactive)



In Short

A brief look at this month's news



▶ A 3D fighter staring famous

PlayStation mascots – including Kratos and Parappa the Rapper – is rumoured to be in development at SuperBot Entertainment. Reportedly codenamed *Title Fight*, the game (which doesn't officially exist yet) is already being billed as a rival to Nintendo's popular *Super Smash Bros.* franchise.

- ▶ Iran's police have outlawed **Battlefield 3** because it depicts US forces fighting in Tehran, the country's capital.
- ▶ Ubisoft has asked the public for help in deciding the location of the next **Assassin's Creed** game. Possibilities include Victorian England, feudal Japan, and pre-Communist revolution Russia.
- ▶ Scaled-down, low resolution maps of Morrowind and Cyrodiil have been discovered in **Skyrim**, suggesting future DLC may take players back to these popular locations from previous instalments in the *Elder Scrolls* series. (Or they could be there just because.)
- ▶ Brendan McNamara, controversial writer and director of **L.A. Noire**, has revealed the title of his new game: *Whore of the Orient*. The game will be developed by Sydney-based production company KMM.
- ▶ **Square Enix** is reportedly using Epic's Unreal 3 engine to make a "massive, original action role-playing game" targeted at Western audiences. So: not *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*.
- ▶ The latest **PS3 firmware update** – 4.0 – enables Vita Remote Play on all games. To ensure PSP compatibility, the resolution is presently limited to an upscaled 480x272, but a Vita-specific 480p mode will also be available in the not-too-distant future.
- ▶ According to Activision, **Call of Duty Elite** now has over a million paying subscribers and over four million registrations.
- ▶ Details on **Yakuza 5** have emerged. A direct sequel to *Yakuza 4*, the game will be a PS3 exclusive and feature five locations to explore: Tokyo, Fukuoka, Osaka, Sapporo, and Nagoya.
- ▶ BigBen Interactive has unveiled a new instalment in the long-running **Test Drive** series of racing games. Called *Test Drive: Ferrari*, the game is due for release in March and is reportedly being made by *Need for Speed: Shift* developer Slightly Mad Studios.
- ▶ **Ubisoft** has opened a new studio Abu Dhabi. According to the press release we received, "this marks the first time a major games publisher has established a direct presence in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf." Uh... so that's... good?
- ▶ Rockstar honcho **Dan Houser** has expressed reservations about the use of 3D in games. "I don't think anyone has solved the riddle of how you make 3D an integral part of the gaming experience," he told *Variety* magazine.
- ▶ Sony has filed a patent for **biometric sensors** for the PS3 DualShock and Move.
- ▶ PSP RPG **Final Fantasy Type-0** sold nearly half a million units during its debut week in Japan. No word yet on a local release.

- *Gravity Rush* (SCE Japan)
- *Hustle Kings* (VooFoo Studios)
- *MotorStorm RC* (Evolution Studios)
- *Top Darts* (Devil's Details)
- *Super StarDust Delta* (Housemarque)

According to senior Sony executive Michael Denny, the line-up is "one of the best launch line-ups" in the history of videogames – and we're inclined to agree with him.

"We're counting down the days to the launch of PS Vita. This is something we are all so excited about [because] that's when we can see PS Vita where it was made to be – in the hands of gamers."

In addition to games, a selection of six Augmented Reality (AR) cards will also be available at launch and will be useable with a number free games to be made available via the PlayStation Store. In contrast to the limited AR functionality of some other portable consoles, the Vita's Wide Angle Augmented Reality (WAAR) system can read multiple cards simultaneously over a large play area. In fact, it doesn't even need cards, because WAAR also supports markerless AR. Snazzy!

On top of that, the Vita will also come with a variety of handy applications pre-installed, including the now ubiquitous Twitter, Flickr,

Skype, FourSquare, and Facebook. Then there's Sony's own social networking utilities: Near (for finding local multiplayer games and swapping in-game items), Party (voice and text chat), and LiveArea Screens (DLC and trophy tracking). All told, it's a pretty comprehensive assortment of apps, especially given that they're all ready to go right out of the box.

Looking beyond launch, Sony also revealed a massive list of third-party games currently in development for their new portable. Space unfortunately prohibits us from listing them all, but highlights include *Ninja Gaiden*, *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Call of Duty*.

Finally, for those of you who don't want to run the risk of missing out on a Vita come launch day, SCE Australia has confirmed pre-order details for GAME, EB, and JB Hi-Fi stores. For a very reasonable \$449.95 (or \$349.95 for the 3G-less model) you will get the machine, some nifty metallic blue earbuds, exclusive PSN items (including discounts on selected games), an exclusive Vita avatar and items for Home (t-shirt, sunglasses, headphones, trainer, and bag), and exclusive early access to the delightfully named Frobisher Says! app. Not a bad bundle, really!

INTERVIEW

Drawing Conclusions

We draw **Wayne Cline**, Director of Development, into a discussion about the new uDraw peripheral for PS3

This generation has been pretty heavy on peripherals, be they motion gadgets or music peripherals. Is it a hard task convincing people to try having another peripheral in the house?

Wayne Cline: What the uDraw offers is a new way to play on your console, not just artistically, but also with games like *Marvel Super Hero Squad: Comic Combat*, which combines the uDraw technology with RTS elements like selecting and moving the characters. Hopefully, it's originality like this that will attract people and families to the tablets.

What are the benefits of uDraw? Just how creative can an untrained artist hope to get with it?

WC: Just like with a pencil and paper, or a full canvas and paints, the possibilities with *uDraw Studio: Instant Artist* are unlimited, regardless of skill level. We've provided many different tools, stamps and canvas types for players to use, as well as colouring book pages, tilt painting, and splat painting. We've even included sixteen lessons in our Art School section to teach new artists some of the fundamental principles of art. So we've certainly provided the tools any artist would need – what they can do is only limited by their imagination.

Fetching sketching

Here's the uDraw and some art drawn by Joe Madureira, the *Darksiders* comic artist.



And what about a person who knows their way around pens and paint?

WC: We've had a number of professional artists, like Autumn De Forest, Maggie Parr and Joe Madureira, make some wonderful works of art using *uDraw Studio: Instant Artist*. We also have a number of user-submitted pieces that are amazing.

Once we do create a masterpiece with uDraw, is it possible to export it and at what sort of resolutions?

WC: Yes, for the PS3 version, once you've finished your masterpiece, you can export it to <http://www.worldofudraw.com> and then grab your painting as a .PNG file. You can then print it, post it to Facebook, email it or just make a wallpaper out of it. You can also choose to share it in our public gallery for all to admire.

Obviously, a peripheral lives and dies by the amount of software support it has. Can you give us a list of what titles will facilitate uDraw (either out now, in production, or on the horizon).

WC: Since last year's launch of uDraw for Wii, we've released a number of titles, including *SpongeBob SquigglePants*, *Pictionary*, *Dood's Big Adventure*, *Penguins of Madagascar*, *Kung Fu Panda* and most recently, *Disney Princess: Enchanting Storybooks*. We've got several launch day games for the PS3 including *Pictionary* and *Marvel Super Hero Squad*, and



while we haven't announced new titles yet, you can rest assured we've got some big plans in the works throughout 2012.

How robust is the unit, and this is a question coming from a parent with a two year old who has just discovered how to drop things and spill his juice on them.

WC: The uDraw GameTablets are very solid and go through rigorous safety testing. For normal use, they will survive, but I guess it depends on just how "active" your two-year-old is.

The Wii version of uDraw incorporated the motion capabilities of the Wii Remote to give users the ability to tilt and roll the tablet for a variety of game play experiences. Will you be incorporating something similar with PlayStation Move?

WC: Actually, since we eliminated the need to dock console controllers, the PS3 uDraw tablets have a 3-axis motion sensor built in. So we do have gameplay features, like tilt-mazes and tilt-painting that use this feature. Players can even shake their tablets to create earthquakes in *Marvel Super Hero Squad: Comic Combat*.

OPS VAULT JANUARY

2003 ▶

The more things change, the more they get repeated until you just wish Flanders was dead. We were screaming for an R18+ rating as *GTA Vice City* had been censored for the Australian market (usual issue of prostitutes). However, another open-world action title snared our attention (and a coveted 9/10): *The Getaway*, envisioned by the same bloke who headed *L.A. Noire*, Brendan McNamara. At the other end of the reviewing spectrum was the woeful *Gumball 3000* and *Virtua Cop Elite*, both limping home with 3/10. However, our feature on cel-shaded graphics was something everyone could enjoy.



2006 ▶

We were very excited as we were about to get our hands all over the PS3, and we chatted to industry bigwigs about what they wanted to do on PS3. There was also a retrospective on the last 10 years of PlayStation in Australia. We were far from done with the PS2 though, as Lara Croft was back in *Tomb Raider: Legend*, courtesy of new developer Crystal Dynamics. Another (literal) videogame giant also commanded our pages: *Shadow of Colossus*, as it was going to "deliver a spectacular toe-to-toe on a scale so overwhelming that players would never forget their first giant-topple."



2011 ▶

There were a few no-shows from our '52 Games You Must See' feature. Some, like *True Crime: Hong Kong* were cut down only a month or two from being released, while others like *Twisted Metal* have slipped into 2012. That issue had a habit of no-shows, as the brutal *Mortal Kombat* captured our attention but was denied classification a few months later. Great review issue too, as *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, *Need For Speed Hot Pursuit* and *God of War Ghost of Sparta* got a healthy 9/10, and *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* a 10.



► IN YOUR FACE

Does Call of Duty need some serious innovation to stay #1?



Bennett Ring

YES

Fickle and easily bored, Bennett is always seeking out new experiences to expand his horizons. Get a few drinks in him and he'll give almost anything a go. (Almost.)

thanks to its shiny new graphics engine, a shift from World War II to modern times, and an intense focus on epic set pieces. It was so good that I could stomach doing it all over again in *Modern Warfare 2*.

But doing it all for a third time was one time too many. Despite being set in all new locations, the game looked and felt exactly like its two predecessors; an exploding shanty town in Africa looks remarkably like an exploding shanty town in Rio. I can't recall being excited once during my completion of the campaign, and it's because I'd been there, done that. When the only new feature in the entire game is the ability to mount an extra scope on your rifle, it's obvious that the well of innovation has run dry, and gamers craving that next new gameplay experience simply won't tolerate it. Looking at *MW3*'s 3.2/10 user rating on Metacritic (compared to 8.4 for the original), it appears I'm not the only one who feels this way.

I love shooting filthy, communist whoevers in the face as much as the next gamer, especially when they're of the nasty ultra-nationalist variety, but there's only so many times I can do it precisely the same way before I'd rather stick my M4A1 into my own gob. When I sat down with *Modern Warfare 3* on release day it became apparent within mere minutes that Infinity Ward hadn't changed a single damn thing, and I realised that it's just not good enough.

Look at every other major franchise on the market, and you'll see that each sequel tries its best to add something new into the mix, usually adding tweaks to the mechanics so the tired old gameplay feels fresh again, yet still familiar. Or perhaps they'll add new graphics technology, a lick of paint to renovate the visual experience. Even a simple change in tone can be enough to satiate gamers' thirst for the new. *Call of Duty* did all three – the original *Modern Warfare* was a smash hit

I reckon if you gave me five days I could come up with 775 million reasons at a buck a pop that it doesn't.

Whether you love it for its fast-paced action, over the top blockbuster movie moments and strong cast of Hollywood A-List voice actors, or hate it for its camping idiots, all too familiar gameplay and safe yearly business model, the numbers don't lie.

The fact is that *MW3* outsold *Battlefield 3* by a massive margin and retains the throne as king of first-person shooters regardless of how much reviewers chastise it for sticking to its cut and paste formula. Seriously, can you blame Activision for playing it safe? Hmm, they've double-tapped the most successful entertainment launch two years running and netted a cool couple of billion clams with negligible risk. Gee, I bet Bobby Kotick is crying himself to sleep every night...

On top of all that it's managed to entice over *Battlefield* lovers with a few simple team-based additions to multiplayer like Kill Confirmed and *COD*'s take on Onslaught with Spec Ops. All this with only slightly upgraded graphics, a marginally longer campaign and minor modifications to multiplayer.

Throw in the extra coin it'll rake in via Elite subscribers and do you really think the developers even give two shits about critical acclaim or setting a new shooter standard for the industry? For every gamer that bitches and moans about *COD* there's another parting with their cold hard cash to get in on the action.

Gamers' wallets have spoken declaring *Call of Duty* the clear winner, as have those that frequent its multiplayer. When you consider the only title to knock *Black Ops* off the online multiplayer top spot is *Modern Warfare 3* where exactly does the incessant cry for innovation fit in?



Dave Kozicki

NO

A simple man with simple tastes, Dave likes his beer cold, his television loud, and his shooters safe and predictable. For him, "change" is something you keep in your wallet.

Want to get into a great debate with one of us here at OPS, or a fellow reader? Well you'd best hop onto www.facebook.com/OPSAustralia and make your case there. Argue well enough (and without resorting to name-calling or promises of violence) and you might just see your topics find their way into the magazine!

► IN REALITY

Self-aiming Smartguns

As seen in: *Resistance, Aliens vs Predator*

The worst thing that can happen to you when firing a gun, beyond shooting yourself, is missing your target completely. Showing the world you have drunk Stormtrooper accuracy is never good; not only is it a waste of expensive ammunition, but it's an open invitation for other gunmen to show you how it's really done. It'll be the last lesson you ever learn, too.

Since the mid-1980s science fiction movies have tantalised us cross-eyed folk with devices that remove the need for hand-eye coordination and skill. Most notable of which were the smartguns present in James Cameron's *Aliens* (which we used to deadly 'aim-assisted' effect in *Aliens Vs. Predator*), and *Fifth Element* made us drool with Zorg's ZF-1 (a homing rifle that was fairly shamelessly ripped off by *Resistance*'s Bullseye).

We're all for fancypants firearms that do all the work for us, but how close are we to replicating them in real life? In two words: stupidly near.

Picture this; somewhere in the near future a sniper crouches on a hill and zooms in on a distant enemy who is unaware of his presence, so much so he's picking his nose with one hand and readjusting himself with the other. The sniper peers through a scope, holds his breath and prepares to deliver some long range, decidedly unfashionable body-piercing. But suddenly he hesitates; it's windier than a cabbage-eating

► Dead Easy

Because of interest expressed by the US military in the next phase of the One Shot XG's development, much effort is being expended to create a significantly smaller 'field-ready system' that can be 'clipped-on' directly to any weapon. How will this system be interpreted in the gaming space? Most likely a "100% auto-aiming" attachment for your favourite scoped weapon.

We often hear veteran gamers bemoan the fact that shooters are being dumbed down, but perhaps it's just art imitating life, rather than designers designing for casual gamers. Clearly the act of handing another human their arse is getting easier. Blame progress, people.



"Go up and to the right a bit. To the RIGHT. Oh look, just forget it. Let me do it."

contest outside and one missed shot could turn a headshot into a hair part. What to do?

This is where the One-Shot system, currently under development by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), comes in. It's a new electro-optical system that will calculate the ballistics for our noobish sniper, telling him where to aim and ensuring a perfect shot – no matter the weather conditions.

Lockheed Martin won a \$6.9 million contract late last year for the second phase of DARPA's One-Shot system, which will provide direct observations of a target, measure every variable that influences a bullet's flight and calculate the aim offset in a sniper's rifle scope.

During the project's first phase, which started in 2007, Lockheed developed a down-range system that measured average crosswind, range to target, spotter scope position, air temperature, pressure, humidity,

and more, according to Military Aerospace. Using all those variables, the company calculated the ballistics for a .308 bullet at ranges as far as 1100 metres.

It was quite a feat, but the system that achieved all that was deemed too heavy and unwieldy, and it couldn't be used with standard rifle scopes. The phase-two design will be more compact and able to operate in real time and over much longer distances. It'll also measure atmospheric conditions, account for the weapon's maximum effective range and include GPS coordinates. Using that data it will communicate with the rifle scope, informing the gun itself of the aim point offset and expected crosswind.

Lockheed is set to deliver 15 field-testable prototypes by the time you read this. So God help the poor bastard who breaks ranks for a quick nasal extraction in any warzone where these puppies are deployed.

► NUMBER CRUNCHING

650 Million

▲ The number of dollars *Call of Duty: Black Ops* made in its first five days of sale one year ago.

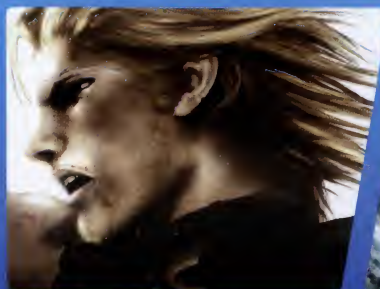


775 Million

▲ Total number of dollars *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* generated in its first five days of sale.

Separated at Birth!

NO. 34 Chris Hemsworth / Basch von Ronsenburg



Chris Hemsworth, Aussie born and bred, was raised in the outback on a cattle ranch. Chris was given a pure heart and a peaceful way of life thanks to his career starting in the land of fantasy that is *Home and Away*, where he appeared in over 170 episodes. It was only when he was cast in the blockbuster *Thor* that he got star status. Basch on the other hand started his career in a *Final Fantasy* in the Republic of Lands, where he was raised in a peaceful time, only to be ruined and destroyed by the Archadian Empire when they attacked Landis. So yeah, they may look alike, but they've got bugger all else in common.



► INFOCUS

Dragon's Crown

The beat 'em up is back! Vanillaware is resurrecting 2D brawlers with its latest addition, *Dragon's Crown*. This side-scrolling swashbuckler uses a similar play style to their previous (unfortunately Wii-only) game *Muramasa: Demon's Blade*, and offers a fresh take on 2D stabfests. On offer are six different playable characters, all with their own custom animations, strengths and weaknesses. Be you a Fighter, Amazon, Elf, Sorceress, Wizard or Dwarf, *Dragon's Crown* will make your eyeballs melt with its quirky character designs and high resolution art style. Having a diverse team will pay dividends in the four player co-op mode where you and your mates can hack and slash through a lengthy campaign together. A PlayStation exclusive, *Dragon's Crown* will be released mid 2012 on the PS3 and PS Vita. Better yet, saved games will be transferable across both platforms, enabling you to take your character with you wherever you go.



SO YOU WANT TO BE A ... BASKETBALLER

OPTION 1

There's something superstar-ish about basketball players. Maybe it's their larger than life appearance, but earning a legendary status takes more hard work than you'd think.

Jeral Grant, 22, plays with the Sydney Kings as a power forward. Growing up on the outskirts of DC in the US, the sport was "on another level out there. You either be a basketball player [or risk] not being seen to be a part of where you grew up."

His high-school, DeMatha Catholic, is renowned for being one of the most prestigious schools that focussed equally on academics and athletics. After DeMatha Grant progressed to college when he was approximately 17. "It was up to me how much effort I wanted to put in," he said. "It was non-stop work." In summer it was a 6a.m. starts, classes, then training again, and homework, estimating that he was putting in four hours practice a day. Of course, this meant sacrificing his social life, going out once a weekend if at all, and although Grant says he was perceived as being a bit of a loner it's paid off. "[Doing this] separates the people who want to go further than those who are satisfied being where they are."

After college it was a matter of finding the right team to go to. Working with an agent, Grant had to wait and see what was happening with the NBA lockout, and decided that travelling to the other side of the world to play with the Sydney Kings was the best option.

On dealing with the pressure of each match Grant says "A lot of things go through my mind, but I have to focus on one aspect of the game. If we play a certain team and our focus is trying to rebound the ball, then I concentrate on that a lot."

There's a lot of preparation in reading pages of scout reports, detailing what players on other teams do, but it's better to actually see what the other players can do. It's up to the individual to check for more recent footage.

All this on-court work can lead to severe knee problems, and Grant says "everyone has had tendonitis at one point in their life. It's a matter of knowing your limitations and knowing what you can push through."

Complacency is not an option to get into the NBA. "I don't think there's just one thing I should improve on; it's everything. The better you are at everything, the more versatile you are."

TIME:

Try for the NBA by the time you're 21, then play through until you can't take any more. Michael Jordan ultimately retired by the time he was 40 with wrecked cartilage in his knee.

OPTION 2

Turn on *NBA 2K12*.

TIME:

Five minutes.

► INTERVIEW

The Batz in the belfry

We speak to **David Longo**. He's the Monolith Art Director, and creator of all things criminally awesome, or insane, in *Gotham City Impostors*.



OPS: So what's your role involve?

David Longo: Being the Art Director on a project means I have to ensure the vision for what the project is remains consistent. Also to keep everything looking as good as it possibly can be. If it doesn't look good, uh, then that's my fault. I've been the Art Director here at Monolith for quite some time, going back to *No One Lives Forever*, *No One Lives Forever 2* and the first *F.E.A.R.* title.

We're loving the ghetto approach to costumes and weapons in *Impostors*. What are your inspirations for those designs?

DL: Well we definitely looked at the Internet for all the cosplay stuff out there which, as I'm sure you're aware, there is no shortage of misfit and failed attempts at trying to recreate people's favourite heroes and villains. But I think our homebrew approach to the costumes and weapons is something that just naturally evolved when we started thinking about Gotham City's fringe population. Those people obviously don't have the resources of Bruce Wayne, so we made sure everything had a low-tech feel. For example, things like the grapple gun has a fishing reel on it and the gliders are fashioned out of a couple of kites slapped on somebody's back. Obviously we didn't go totally realistic with our physics, but that's just the style of the game; a little whimsical and a little crazy.

Just out of curiosity, were you ever tempted to try out the gritty, realistic visuals of *Rocksteady's* games?

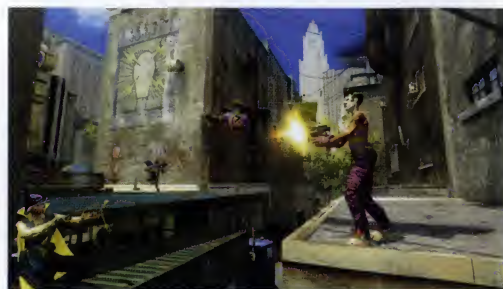
DL: We absolutely looked at *Arkham City* and I think that one of the great things about the Batman franchise is that it has been re-envisioned, re-imagined and executed in so many different ways. Just look at how different the Christopher Nolan films, the comics by Jim Lee and even the more stylised and quirky Frank Miller Batman stuff is. We realised that we were trying to do something a little bit different in the Batman universe, and we really tried to embrace that. For example, the times of day that our maps are set in are very dawn through dusk. Firstly, because it works much better for multiplayer but also because it fits

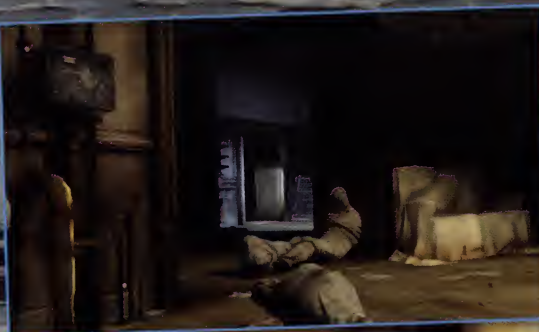
"We definitely looked at the Internet for all the cosplay stuff out there, **which, as I'm sure you're aware, there is no shortage of misfit and failed attempts**"

with the whole theme of "Batman owns the night and our crazies would be trying to avoid him". We wanted to look like no other Batman experience that has gone before and I think we've achieved that.

You mention Jim Lee there. We've heard that he had good things to say about *Gotham City Impostors*?

DL: Actually DC did put out an *Impostors*-style story line in October last year (a four-part series called *Impostors Among Us*). That actually came about because we had Jim Lee come in here early on when we were explaining our idea to DC licensing. I was totally stressed out about it, but he turned out to be a super cool guy, really low-key and he plays a tonne of games, shooters in particular, too. When he saw what we were doing he got really excited and started throwing out ideas. It was great to get his blessing. 🐼





► INFOCUS

Dishonored

Primarily a first person action game, *Dishonored* drops the tropes typical of the genre and incorporates a more in-depth RPG feel, giving the player unprecedented freedom to play how they like. According to developer Arkane Studios, "it is possible to complete the game without killing anyone". Using magic and stealth as its primary elements, the game is designed to encourage you to think up your

own unique tactics for overcoming its myriad challenges. Whether it be stopping time the moment an enemy opens fire – then possessing him and walking him in front of his own bullets – or calling in a swarm of rats and possessing one to run away from the fight unnoticed, *Dishonored* will let you play how you want to play, an uncommon commodity taken for granted in this generation of linear action games.

▶ TOP TEN

Crap games made by rad studios

Mistakes. We all make them. For example, this morning we were driving to work and accidentally ran over a homeless person. Twice. But unless you've committed crimes against humanity, a little boo-boo now and then is generally permissible, even if you're a famous game developer. Keeping that in mind, we take a look at the worst of the best: Z-grade games from AAA studios. Behold the horror of good developers gone bad...



1 Naughty Dog - Way of the Warrior (1994)

With an outstanding pedigree bringing gamers three beloved franchises – *Crash Bandicoot*, *Jak and Daxter* and *Uncharted* – Naughty Dog has been among gaming's elite for a long time now, but it wasn't always this way. Hearken back to 1994 and a blatant *Mortal Kombat* rip off called *Way of the Warrior*. With fatalities and buckets of blood it was a basic cut and paste job showing none of the innovation the developer is known for.



2 Yuke's Future Media Creations - WWE '12 (2011)

Breathing life into the stale sports combat genre with the wonderfully intuitive *UFC Undisputed*, Yuke's latest offering (bodyslammed in issue 63) is disappointing to say the least. Plodding, filled with QTEs and instantly forgettable, we hope this is only a minor setback.



3 Bethesda Softworks - Where's Waldo? (1991)

In 1991, Bethesda – the studio responsible for what could easily be 2011's game of the year – created a point-and-click version of the classic "Where's Wally/Waldo?" books for the NES. Predictably it was buggy, tedious, and totally pointless.



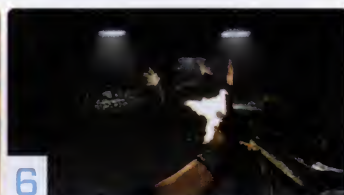
4 Obsidian Entertainment - Alpha Protocol (2010)

From the team that brought you the amazing *Fallout: New Vegas* and stellar *Dungeon Siege III* came a spy RPG that could have been so mint, but fell by the wayside. *Alpha Protocol* was full of great ideas but shockingly executed. We like it in theory, but in practice? Not so much.



5 Silicon Knights - X-Men: Destiny (2011)

Responsible for titles like *Legacy of Kain* and *Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes* (a rad remake wasted on the Gamecube), Silicon Knights phoned it in with *X-Men: Destiny*. Boring from start to finish, this could've been a great superhero game, but is instead utterly forgettable.



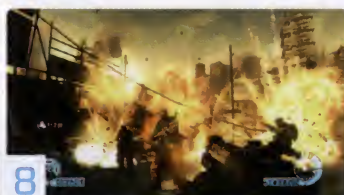
6 Midway - BlackSite: Area 51 (2007)

Meant to revolutionise the first-person shooter with its squad based tactics, a morale system to inspire team-mates, and scathing political commentary, the usually dependable (now defunct) Midway Games should have nailed down the shooting mechanics first.



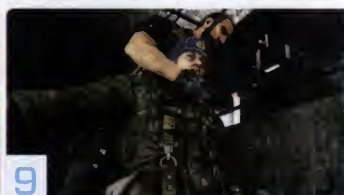
7 Ubisoft Montreal - Michael Jackson: The Experience (2010)

From the guys that brought you the sexiest men in medieval assassination came this odd little hiccup. It may have sold well on PS3, but it played terribly, making half-hearted use of the Move to deliver an experience more flop than pop.



8 Codemasters - Bodycount (2011)

Bodycount was supposed to be a thrill-a-minute blast-a-thon, but unfortunately Codies forgot to add little things like cool weapons and competent enemy AI. You could pretty much bolt through sections hitting checkpoint after checkpoint with your weapon holstered... sheesh!



9 Rebellion - Rogue Warrior (2009)

Now we love Mickey Rourke as much as the next guy, but even his silver tongue couldn't get this stinker over the line. It was a perfect storm of crap. Short in length, excessive foul language (which we're usually fans of), bad controls and utterly glitchtastic. Renowned as one of the worst games of all time for a reason.



10 Square Enix - Final Fantasy XIV (2010)

Oh how the mighty have fallen. With a Metacritic score of 49, *FFXIV* was an unmitigated disaster for Square Enix and is widely regarded as one of the worst MMORPGs ever released. There's no single problem with it – everything is the problem. The interface, the quest structure, the NPCs, and overarching narrative are all garbage, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. *FFXIV* is so bad that Square Enix decided to retcon it and will release a new version (2.0) in a few months time.

grand theft speedos

Bridge Smuggler's Run





Around the World in PS3

OPS trawls high and low for what's going on around the globe in gaming



IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE...

🇯🇵 TOKYO, JAPAN

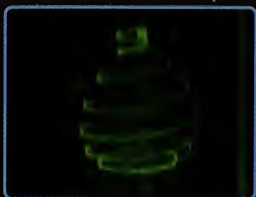
The life-size Gundam statue that has appeared sporadically in Odaiba and Shizuoka during the summer since the past few years is being rebuilt and is set to return in all of its nerdy, nerdy glory early next year. At 18 feet, it probably won't fit on your desk. The statue was originally constructed in 2009 for the 30th anniversary of the Gundam franchise. It moved to Shizuoka some time later and was damaged in the March 11 earthquake (which is the *official* report; we suspect evil robots were the real cause). Once the new statue is complete, it will remain on display until March 2013.



ROBOCOP RETURNS

🇰🇷 POHANG, SOUTH KOREA

As of next March, the eastern city of Pohang plans to begin a month-long trail to have robot wardens patrol prisons. The three 'Robocops' will help reduce the workload for the other guards while monitoring for abnormal behaviour in the inmates. 'Abnormal behaviour' may very well include inmates shanking their circuits. Standing at 1.5m tall, the robots are being developed by the Asian Forum for Corrections who specialise in criminality and prison policies. Equipped with cameras and other sensors, the miniature automatons move around on four wheels to patrol and look way too cheerful for a prison setting.



EVERYTHING IS BETTER WITH LASERS

🇯🇵 TOKYO, JAPAN

Aerial 3D is a laser system that projects beams of light from below to generate plasma excitation in atoms of oxygen and nitrogen in the air without the need for a screen. That's right, after years of science fiction feeding us broken promises, we finally have holograms. Burton Technology's system is able to create 50,000 points of light per second, which evens out to about a laggy 10-15 frames per second. They're working to improve that to 30 frames per second to meet the standards of basic video, so you'll have to hold on to your dreams of playing holographic games for just a little longer.



AIMING FOR A HIGH SCORE

🇬🇧 LONDON, UK

In an attempt to alleviate boredom and general sloppiness, British company Captive Media has developed a urinal mounted, urine-controlled console. The console consists of a 12 inch LCD screen, and is controlled by three 'target' stickers on the urinal that read 'start', 'left' and 'right'. The input is detected using an infra-red device. Considering that, on average, men are stuck staring at a wall of tiles for 55 seconds while they relieve themselves, adding up to nine months over the course of their lifetimes - wouldn't you rather be productive in the porcelain palace? Early reviews say it's 'piss fun'.



CINDERELLA LAW

🇰🇷 SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

The South Korean government has recently put a midnight to 6am ban on online gaming for children aged under 16. While the Shutdown Law was passed earlier this year in an effort to curb online gaming addiction, it came into effect as of the 20th of November. Interestingly, this ban affects PSN as well as PC gaming, and children under 15 will be unable to register for a PSN account following the curfew. The Korea Association of Game Industry (KAGI) claims that the law "enforces excessive prohibition on a small number of players". Those caught playing will have their 600 hour save games wiped. Probably.

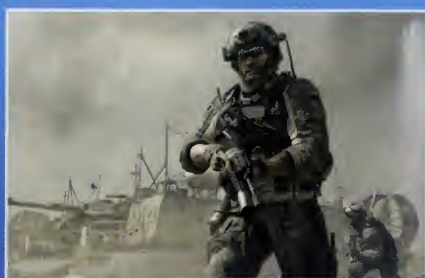
INTERNATIONAL TOP 5 CHARTS

🇪🇺 EUROPE



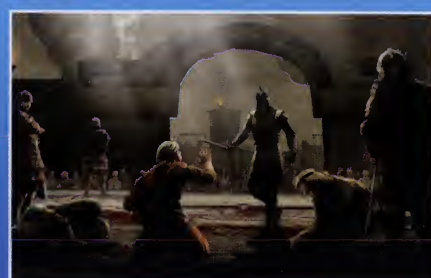
- 1 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3** Activision
- 2 **Assassin's Creed Revelations** Ubisoft
- 3 **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim** Activision
- 4 **Saints Row: The Third** THQ
- 5 **FIFA Soccer 12** EA

🇯🇵 JAPAN



- 1 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3** Activision
- 2 **Ninokuni: Shiroki Seihai no Joou** Level 5
- 3 **Saints Row: The Third** THQ
- 4 **Sengoku Basara 3** Utage Capcom
- 5 **Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3** Capcom

🇺🇸 USA



- 1 **Assassin's Creed Revelations** Ubisoft
- 2 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3** Activision
- 3 **Saints Row: The Third** THQ
- 4 **Need for Speed: The Run** EA
- 5 **Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim** Bethesda

THIS MONTH

Your 30-day planner of games and the good stuff!

Jan 1

Sorry for yourself

We'll be impressed if you're in good enough shape to game today. What was in that punch? Who's name is tattooed here? Where's my car?



Jan 5

Smurftacular

Parents after something to keep the ankle-biters at bay should grab *The Smurfs Movie* on Blu-ray. Older folks should check out the body-switching comedy *Change Up*.



Jan 5

'Sup Holmes?

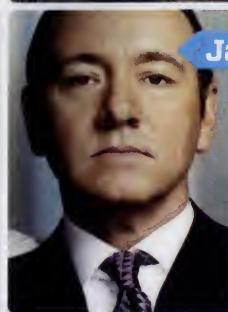
We dug the first one and now it's time to get to the bottom of the sequel. *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* launches in cinemas today. Check it.



Jan 11

Blu-heaven

Nope, no games releases yet. Bide your time with some ray of Blu. Today's releases include *Horrible Bosses*, *13 Assassins*, and *Cedar Rapids*.



Jan 12

Bean. James Bean

Rowan Atkinson, otherwise known as Mr. Bean or 'the rich dude that crashed our favourite supercar' returns as Johnny English today in, well, *Johnny English*.



Jan 16

40 Love

The Australian Open kicks off in Melbourne today. Tune in, male and female *OPS* readers alike, and try not to be turned on by the excessive grunting you'll hear.



Jan 20

Big Day Out

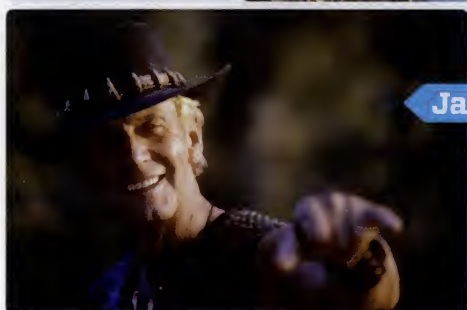
The Big Day Out commences today and promises to be both big and... outward. Go there to see Kanye West, Soundgarden, Kasabian, My Chemical Romance, to name but a few minstrels attending.



Jan 26

Australia Day

Also known as 'Strayla Day', this holiday is one of barbecues, drinking, sunburn, gambling in clubs and fights resulting from said bets. Get amongst it, mate.



Jan 28

J. Edgar Hoover

Clint Eastwood directs Leonardo DiCaprio and Naomi Watts in the biopic *J. Edgar*. Hoover was, of course, the inventor of the vacuum cleaner and cross-dressing.



Can't miss...

Journey 2: The Mysterious Island JANUARY 19

We don't know what interests us *the most* about this movie. The fact that it has a journey to an island cloaked in palpable mysteriousness, that it stars the WTF casting of The Rock and Michael Caine - or - that we know sweet bugger all about the *first* journey. We cannot look away from this.



Release Schedule

Release dates, pre-order deals, new information and much more

OUT NOW

Puss in Boots

Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: December 1

Happy Feet 2

Genre: Action Distributor: Warner Bros. Date: December 2

Just Dance 3

Genre: Rhythm Distributor: Ubisoft Date: December 8

JANUARY 2012

Anarchy Reigns

Genre: Action Distributor: Sega
Date: January 2012

FEBRUARY 2012

Heavy Fire Afghanistan

Genre: Action Distributor: AIE Date: February 1

Outdoors Unlimited

Genre: Action Distributor: AIE Date: February 1

Janes Advanced Strike Fighters

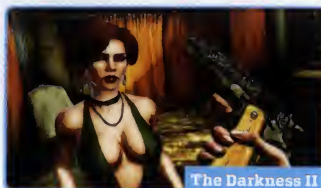
Genre: Sim Distributor: QVS Date: February 1

Saint Seiya Sanctuary Battle

Genre: Sim Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: February 1

Final Fantasy XIII-2

Genre: RPG Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: February 2



The Darkness II

Genre: Shooter Distributor: 2K Games Date: February 10

Starhawk

Genre: Shooter Distributor: Sony Date: February 2012

Inversion

Genre: Shooter Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: February 9

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

Genre: RPG Distributor: EA
Date: February 10

Binary Domain

Genre: Shooter Distributor: SEGA
Date: February 16

SSX

Genre: Sports Distributor: EA
Date: February 16

Syndicate

Genre: Shooter Distributor: EA
Date: February

MARCH 2012

Max Payne 3

Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar
Date: March 1

Silent Hill Downpour

Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Date: March 1

Ridge Racer Unbounded

Genre: Racing Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: March 1

Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations

Genre: Fighting Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: March 1

Armored Core V

Genre: Action Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: March 2012

Mass Effect 3

Genre: RPG Distributor: EA Date: March 8

Rocksmith

Genre: Rhythm Distributor: Music
Date: March 28

Asura's Wrath

Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: March 28

Silent Hill HD Collection

Genre: Shooter Distributor: THQ Date: March 28

Dragon's Dogma

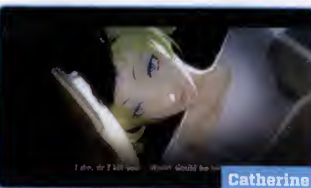
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: March 28

Street Fighter X Tekken

Genre: Fighting Distributor: THQ
Date: March 28

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

Genre: Action Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: March 28



Catherine

Genre: RPG Distributor: QVS Date: March 28

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

Genre: Shooter Distributor: THQ
Date: March 28

Generator Rex: Agent of Providence

Genre: Action Distributor: Activision Date: March 28

APRIL 2012



Prototype 2

Genre: Action-Adventure Distributor: Activision Date: April 2012

TBC 2012

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2

Genre: Shooter Distributor: AFA
Date: TBC 2012



Tomb Raider

Genre: Action-Adventure
Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC 2012

Agent

Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar
Date: TBC 2012

Spec Ops: The Line

Genre: Action Distributor: 2K
Date: TBC 2012

Metal Gear Solid: Rising

Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Date: TBC 2012

The Last Guardian

Genre: Adventure Distributor: Sony
Date: TBC 2012

Hitman: Absolution

Genre: Action Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: TBC 2012

Prey 2

Genre: Shooter Distributor: TBA
Date: TBC 2012

Dust 514

Genre: Shooter Distributor: TBA
Date: TBC 2012

BioShock Infinite

Genre: Shooter Distributor: 2K Date: TBC 2012

Darksiders 2

Genre: Action-Adventure
Distributor: THQ Date: TBC 2012

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

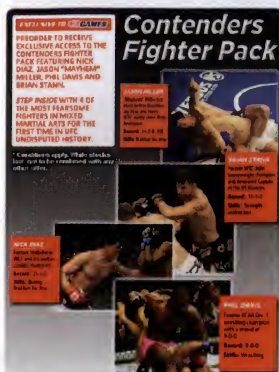
Genre: Platformer Distributor: Sony
Date: TBC 2012

► Collector's Edition

UFC Undisputed 3

The critically acclaimed and best-selling MMA videogame franchise returns to take players inside the Octagon with *UFC Undisputed 3*, delivering intense UFC action focused on intense toe-to-toe combat, impressive visual presentation and increased accessibility. Featuring the addition of PRIDE Mode, a brand new submission system, new ways to finish the fight and increased accessibility through both traditional and simplified gameplay controls, players will experience intense combat and a pure adrenaline rush every time they step inside the Octagon.

EB Exclusive Content: *Contenders Fighter Pack* featuring stunning fighters Nick Diaz, Jason "Mayhem" Miller, Phil Davis and Brian Stann.



EB GAMES \$108

Estimated dispatch date: 19/02/2012

GAME \$98 (KO pack)

Estimated dispatch date: 19/02/2012

Metro: Last Light
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** THQ
Date: TBC 2012

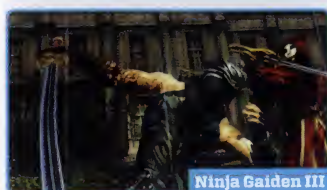
Top Gun
Genre: Flight **Distributor:** Tuff Kat
Entertainment Date: TBC 2012

Rocksmith
Genre: Rhythm **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBC 2012

Aliens: Colonial Marines
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Sega
Date: TBC 2012

Brothers in Arms Furious 4
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBC 2012

Far Cry 3
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBC 2012



Ninja Gaiden III
Genre: Action
Distributor: Namco Bandai
Partners Date: TBC 2012

DmC
Genre: Action **Distributor:** THQ
Date: TBC 2012

Dishonored
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Bethesda/TBA
Date: TBC 2012

Borderlands 2
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** 2K
Date: TBC 2012

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive
Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** EA/
TBA Date: TBC 2012

Grand Theft Auto V
Genre: Action **Distributor:** Rockstar
Date: TBC 2012

► Limited Edition **Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City**

It is September 1998 and the action centres once more on the ill-fated Raccoon City and the horrific consequences of the deadly T-virus outbreak from the Umbrella facility. With a cover up required, Umbrella orders an elite team into Raccoon City to destroy all evidence of the outbreak and eliminate any survivors. Hearing of this plan, the US Government dispatches its own special forces to uncover any evidence that exposes the cause of the viral infection and Umbrella's actions. Players take on the role of an Umbrella Security Services soldier (U.S.S.), competing alone or in four player co-op in a battle against the many competing forces at play in Raccoon City.



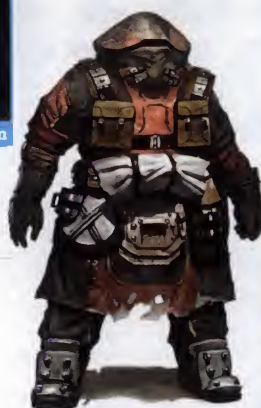
Limited Edition includes: This special edition will be featuring a copy of the *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* game, a Steel book with exclusive art, stylised foil sleeve, Umbrella Security Service embroidered patch, Spec Ops Field Unit embroidered patch, and all 8 bonus weapons.

EB GAMES \$TBA
Estimated dispatch date: 28/03/2012



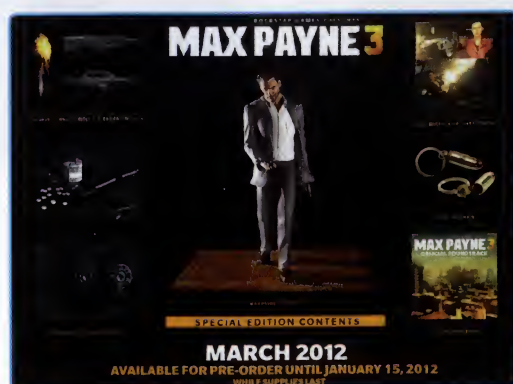
The Last Guardian
Genre: Action **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBC 2012

Twisted Metal
Genre: Racing **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBC 2012



► Special Edition **Max Payne 3**

The award-winning *Max Payne* franchise put players in the role of Max Payne, a hard-boiled New York City detective with a penchant for violence, out to avenge the death of his family. The latest installment aims to deliver more of the classic elements and hyper-intense action that fans have come to love, while moving the story of Max in a new direction.



Special Edition includes:

Game, 10" statue, still life art prints, bullet keychain, 8 multiplayer skins, Disorderly Conduct guns pack, official soundtrack.



EB GAMES \$148
Estimated dispatch date: 30/03/2012

JB HIPI \$144
Estimated dispatch date: 30/03/2012

GAME \$149
Estimated dispatch date: 30/03/2012

In their WORDS

Industry chatter, inside tips and loose lips



"I created *Call Of Duty* to dethrone the [top dog FPS] leaders back in the

early 2000s, and you bet my goal at U4iA is to repeat that success again."

Bold words from Dusty Welch, ex-Activision exec, now the founder and CEO of U4iA (or 'Euphoria' for the non-133t).

"*Battlefield* and *Call of Duty* are competing to be the same game. And I'm not really interested in that. I don't feel that we're competing with anyone else."

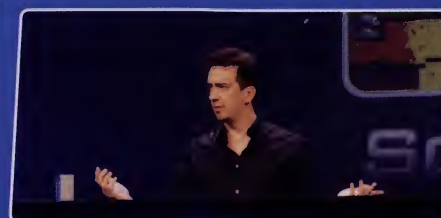
Ubisoft designer **Phil Therien** on how *Rainbow 6 Patriots* hopes to stand apart from *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty*.



"Our goal is to create greater service value than pirates, and this has been

successful enough for us that piracy is basically a non-issue for our company."

Valve managing director **Gabe Newell** claims that piracy doesn't faze his company.



"Now it's just insane. If you aren't going to be a mega hit at [full price], then you might as well give up before you even try, because it's tens of millions down the hole."

5th Cell Creative Director **Jeremiah Slaczk** on why THQ stablemate *Homefront* bombed and why the current retail model is 'broken'.



POLITICS AS (UN)USUAL

Viva la revolution?

Stormcloaks or the Empire. Stormcloaks or the Empire. Which one did you choose? The fact that this question is a topic of considerable debate among my friends is a testament to the skill with which Bethesda has realised the social and political landscape of *Skyrim*. There's no binary distinction between good and evil here: the war for control of Skyrim's destiny as a sovereign nation is an ambiguous and decidedly murky conflict fought by men and women whose goals and motivations are far from obvious. It's political in the dirtiest sense of the word.

On the one hand we have the Stormcloaks – a revolutionary army seeking to reclaim Skyrim from the Empire and place it back in the hands of its traditional Nord leaders. Which, on the face of it, seems fair enough. After all, most people would agree that all sovereign nations have the right to self-determination, even if they happen to be overrun with dragons. In this regard, Skyrim is not at all dissimilar to real world countries like India, Algeria, and even pre-revolutionary America. In all these cases, former colonies of established imperial powers threw off the shackles of foreign domination and exploitation – sometimes peacefully, sometimes violently – and few today would dispute their right to do so.

But what if there were mitigating circumstances? What if the revolution were not quite so benign, and in fact had all the hallmarks of a fledgling fascist dictatorship? There's very little doubt that Ulfric Stormcloak and the rest of his rebel army are genuine patriots, but pay close attention to their rhetoric and an ugly undercurrent of bigotry and authoritarianism becomes disturbingly apparent. Stormcloak literature, as exemplified by in-game books like *Nords Arise!* and others, is chock full of veiled and not-so-veiled xenophobia, particularly against Tamriel's elven races. There are even hints that, once the Stormcloaks seize power, they'll simply begin "relocating" foreigners *en masse*.


Sound familiar? It should: the Nazis tried the same thing – before it became too costly and they just started killing people instead. Is this the kind of government you want to shepherd into power? Does the right to sovereign self-determination override all other concerns, to the point where ANY independent government is preferable to one under the thumb of foreign powers?

Complicating matters further is the fact that the presence of the Empire in Skyrim is arguably necessary to keep the country from being crushed under the boot of a much more sinister

"There's no binary distinction between good and evil here ... [Skyrim] is political in the dirtiest sense of the word"

imperial power: the Aldmeri Dominion. An autocratic empire lead by elven supremacists called the Thalmor, the Dominion's overt goal is the total domination of Tamriel for the purpose of subjugating all non-elven races, including humans. Were it not the Empire, it is very likely that the Dominion would invade Skyrim and find very little in the way of organised resistance. Given this, you can't but wonder if a rebellion is warranted, particularly since any kind of civil war would necessarily weaken both sides to the ultimate benefit of the Thalmor.

Then there are the dragons...

I haven't finished *Skyrim* yet, so I don't know how all of this turns out, or whether or not there are variables in play that I've not encountered yet. Even so, the fact that discussions like this are even possible is impressive indeed. Few games capture the bleak uncertainty and Machiavellian complexity of imperial politics with such finesse, and for that (among many other things) Bethesda deserves massive kudos. So: kudos to you, Bethesda! Kudos! 



OPINION
Dan Staines

Dan Staines believes that politicians are like nappies: both should be changed regularly and for the same reason. (He also stole that quote from the intertrons.)



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A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF

One man wants the best of everything, and he wants it now

A few weeks ago, the Champion Mode from *Fight Night Champion* went up on the PSN. That mode's just the straight career part of the game where you play as an up-and-coming brawler, and while the story was packed with cliché that liberally borrowed from every boxing movie ever made, it was one of the best parts of an overall excellent game. It had a tangible villain and hero, and put you in the gloves of Andre Bishop to fulfil his dream of being Middleweight Champion of the World.

It was also keenly priced: \$8.45.

Not a bad way to hook in people who might be thinking about picking up the game, as this six-hour slice could be added to later with the rest of the modes. It's also perfect for those people who didn't want to invest themselves in an entire sports game.

It's also a way of letting you play the game and have some cultural grip. Sure, *Fight Night Champion*'s not the biggest selling title of the year but EA's strategy of dividing a game into easy-to-handle chunks can be applied across a whole bunch of genres. For instance, I own *Skyrim* by virtue that I work for a gaming mag and get sent stuff to play, but I really doubt that I'm ever going to put much time in to it. And that's a problem; I know it's brilliant, everyone's talking about it, and I want to be able to talk about it too.

Same thing happened with *Fallout: New Vegas*. Looked like a lot fun, loved the concept, but it's waiting on my shelf. I doubt

I'll ever put any time into it at all because I feel like it's going to take me double-digit hours to reach the really fun parts and there's so much other stuff inbound.

It must be a nightmare for regular punters.


There's only so much cash and time you can give

to games, but there are many excellent titles out there. Consider that the average age of a gamer is 30-something; I bet a good percentage of them have a job, a partner, kids, and a whole mess

of responsibilities but still want to be able to get involved in whatever the latest thing is. Even a relatively self-contained title like *Batman: Arkham City* could swallow 20-something hours of your life.

Although the games I've mentioned are purely single-player focussed and story-driven, I'd love to be able to get a highlights package that I could buy for a percentage of the RRP. Say, \$30 for the Top 10 moments in *Skyrim* as determined by the devs, with a bit of text telling me what I'm up to.

Doable?

I know there's risks though. There's the risk that it'll belittle the experience. That these vignettes are taken out of context. That the real reward in playing these isn't the explicit story but the manner in which the character has arrived at that point, and what the person holding the controller had to do to get there. Whatever. Right now, I'm on the periphery of the cultural loop, a mute man amongst a gaggle of voices. And I reckon there's a mob out there that are the same too. 

"It must be a nightmare for regular punters. There's only so much cash and time you can give"



OPINION
Paul Taylor

Paul Taylor only wants a shortcut to the best stuff in *Skyrim* because he's spent more time than he thought he would in *Daytona USA* and *Modern Warfare 3*'s Spec Ops mode.

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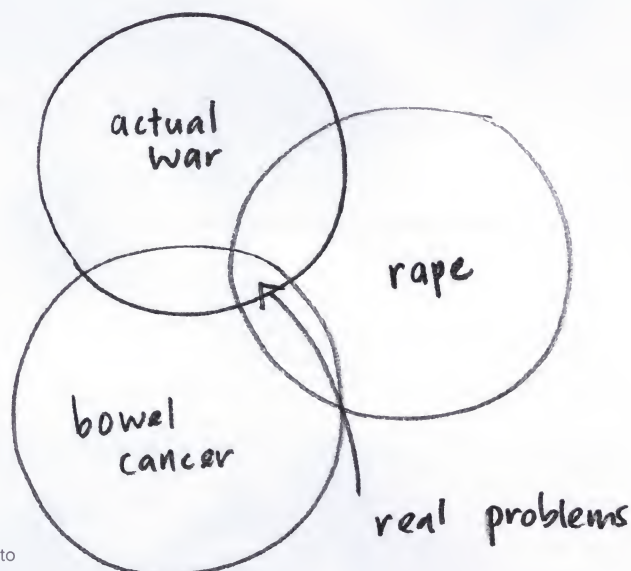
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► OPINION

FIRST-WORLD PROBLEMS

Gettin' mad about stuff that don't matter



I don't care if you don't like *Modern Warfare 3*. It honestly doesn't bother me. I don't have any shares in Activision so the amount of money the game ultimately does or does not make has nil effect on me. I wasn't part of the development team so I have no personal investment in the final product.

I will listen to why you didn't enjoy it, if you explain the reasons to me in a measured way. I'll understand, really. Myself? I thought it was quite good. Not among my own favourites titles of 2011 and largely similar to the last few, sure, but well-executed and typically robust. We'd both walk away with a little insight into each other's position and sleep like babies. I don't have the energy to waste stewing over the fact somebody thinks differently to me, and nor do you most likely.

But some people do.

I got into a debate recently with a friend of a friend of a friend. He hates *Modern Warfare 3*. Hates *Call of Duty* entirely, in fact. He feels the series is languishing, that it's not evolving fast enough. He's certainly not wrong; *Call of Duty* hasn't really undergone any grand, sweeping changes over the last few years. Activision hasn't deviated from the formula at all really.

Unfortunately, then he told me he'd made sure to head straight to Metacritic and give it a zero. On every platform. Including Wii. He told me this fact like he was proud of it.

Worst of all though? He was visibly annoyed that I didn't hate it as much as he did.

He then mentioned something about a

protest but at this point I'd already begun to tune out; his wordhole flapped for a while longer but I was already scanning the area for redheads in glasses.

Paul explored some of the psychology of this back in early 2011 so I won't retread old turf too much. Some people are just so emotionally attached to video games and certain franchises that it's hard for the rational mind to win over the experiential mind. Faced with a new *Call of Duty* that doesn't live up to their expectations, their emotional reaction dictates their behavioural response. In this case, protesting on Metacritic in the form of a barrage of zeros.

What I will say is if this is what constitutes a protest these days with middle-class generation Y types I'm going to have to start lying about my age. I can pass for gen-X. I listened to enough grunge in the '90s, my first car cost less than my parents' first VCR and the predominant colour in all my childhood photographs is plaid.

The fact is bombing a game with zeros on Metacritic and calling it a protest is lamer than a one-legged turtle. I'd like to see this guy boast about his courageous deeds to an Egyptian demonstrator with his face smashed in.

The compulsion to head straight to Metacritic and spam away with zeros is the very definition of a first-world problem, but getting genuinely worked up at people who like something you don't is just going to get you an ulcer.

Or a headbutt. 

"The fact is bombing a game with zeros on Metacritic and calling it a protest is lamer than a one-legged turtle."



OPINION
Angry Sackboy

Angry Sackboy is an ex-videogame journalist who blames himself for this rage because he was watching TV, rather than playing TV.

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PS3
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inbox



▼ LETTER OF THE MONTH

NO BULLET TIME

As a long time gamer, I find myself increasingly despondent as I get older. Pushing 30, life is increasingly just getting in the way of my gaming. I have never felt this so much as I have in the two months of October and November this year.

The staggering quality of releases during this time period has blown my mind, and created a substantial list of "games I'd like to own". *Batman: Arkham City*, *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Assassin's Creed Revelations* – that's probably 250 hours+ right there! That's not even mentioning the games that were already on the list (*LittleBigPlanet*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *Dead Nation*, *inFAMOUS* and *inFAMOUS 2*, and *Killzone 3*). But where do you find the time?

Work rules out the weekdays, the evenings are spent with the missus (not a fan of gaming unfortunately) and also time has to be spent with my 10-week old daughter. What about the weekends? Well, between pulling my weight around the house, making the most of rare sleep ins, visiting family and friends, there are only a few hours left!

The solution? Winning Lotto and quitting my job is the best one... but apparently that's a bit unrealistic. In the mean time I will continue to pinch the odd hour here and there, and hope that games on the horizon aren't so damn good that they get

added to the list (I'm looking at you *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*).

The only other solution: maybe there is a cushy job writing for a certain PlayStation magazine and becoming the envy of gamers the world over to get paid to play games? Such fanciful dreams "sigh"...

Ross, via email

Subtlest. Resume. Ever. Know that we dig your wordcraft, Ross, even if there are no spots to spare here in OPS Towers.

What we can offer you – aside from the ironic gesture that is a free game to play, but no extra time to play it – is commiseration. Truth be told, a lot of our day-to-day involves actual work at a desk

This usually means that we have to take our 'work' home with us. On the plus side, our loved ones sort of have to put up with the fact that we "must" traverse every square inch of *Skyrim*. The first-world problem for us; *Skyrim* is freakin' huge and we'd sometimes rather be seeing mates, playing with our own kids or having another round of a different game (*Daytona USA*, most likely).

Our own personal solution: give biphasic sleep a try, which consists of a core sleep of 4.5 hours plus 1.5 hours during the day. It'll result in extra time to play, maybe a psychotic episode. Either, or.



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS A COPY OF:

TEKKEN HYBRID

You'll knock this over in bugger all time, Ross. Enjoy!



GIRL GAMER

Nothing is more appealing to a man than a woman who can kick his ass.

AN ADDICT IS BORN

Dear OPS,

About two years ago or so, my hubby would be in his room day and night playing *Modern Warfare* on the PlayStation online yelling and screaming, and I would be complaining: "are you playing that all night again?" Soon enough I would sit next to him and help him out. "There's a guy over there," I would scream. Then one day I asked if I could have a go and he set it up on the campaign mode.

I've gotta say, I was fairly hopeless but then I just kept at it. I finished *MW* on campaign, then played *CoD: WaW* and *Modern Warfare 2*. Soon, I was addicted. We had to buy another PlayStation to accommodate my obsession. We had to buy two copies of *MW*, *WaW*, *MW2* and *Black Ops* and we would spend hours and hours online playing zombies and multiplayer. He is in one room with his mic and I'm in the other room with my mic.

We are currently trying to get all the stars in *Spec Ops* in *MW3*. Typically, the only games I would play were shooters (*Homefront*, *Medal of Honor*, *Killzone 3*, *Crysis*, *Resistance* and of course all the *CoDs*) and my hubby told me to try some other types of games.

Low and behold, one day he left *Darksiders* on pause, I picked up the controller and was soon hooked on that as well. My greatest achievement would have to be getting a platinum on *Darksiders*. Not bad for someone who never played any sort of videogame before, huh?

PS: Now we have three PS3 consoles and over 300 PS3 games and I'm looking forward to trying many different ones in the future.

Irene Barton, via email

An anti-gamer wife/girlfriend who decides to pick up a controller one day and become a hardcore gamer overnight? Nay. We'd heard the legends whispered, but never dared to dream that a creature as beautiful and mythical as you might truly exist.

But seriously, good on you for not only giving it a try, but also going through the transformation that made you a fully-fledged PlayStation gamer with the Platinum seal to prove it.

Now if only we could clone you somehow, or get you to host a series of brainwashing workshops disguised as Tupperware parties. Expect a phone call, we're making this happen.

THE FEUD CONTINUES

Hey guys,

Been reading your mag since back in the day of PS2 and demo discs. I decided to give my opinion on a topic close to my heart. I feel the whole *Battlefield 3* vs *Modern Warfare 3* has been massively overblown, with a lot of the firing coming from EA.

This however does not surprise me since we all know no matter what, *Call of Duty* will sell because it's *Call of Duty*, meaning that EA has to try very hard to compete. This however doesn't mean they have to resort to

Speak to us!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

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slag and try to win by insulting another franchise for just doing what it does best.

Now don't tag me as a *Call of Duty* fanboy, I'm far from it. I love *BF3* and have been playing it since launch, charging into battle with my buddies, capturing control points and blowing the hell out of everything I see.

I love the team tactics that *Battlefield* employs and how it rewards not just run 'n' gun, although you're free just to do just that as well. That doesn't mean I don't enjoy the run 'n' gun antics of *Call of Duty*, especially when I'm playing against my buddies.

Both franchises offer unique experiences, *Battlefield* reigns the king of team gameplay in my books and you can't go wrong with the lone wolf, one man army, *Rambo*-induced intensity of *Call of Duty*. I feel that it's unfair to compare two franchises just because they're both shooters, launched around the same time and both have a '3' in the title.

I hope you and the readers can feel the same way as I do (I know I didn't really delve into the single-player but if it's all the same to you, people don't buy these games, just for the single-player and if they do, they are missing out) and can enjoy both games for what they are and not for what they 'should' be. Keep up the good work guys.

Jake, via email

Honestly, it's hard to know who started the pointless fight between the two companies in the lead up. So we're not even going to open that can of he-said, she-said worms.

We wholeheartedly agree that it's not worth bickering over two similar, yet quite different, shooters. Everybody here at *OPS* has played them both and each of us have conflicting opinions on them.

The important thing is we respected each other enough to accept the other side's view for at least long enough to setup a 'Deagles at dawn decider duel' outside. We settled things the old Navy way, too: first guy to die, loses and likes the crap game.

MOAR CONTENT PLZ

Dear *OPS*,

In Issue 61, November 2011, Angry Sackboy wrote an insightful piece on the problems developers face developing 30 hour games which only 10-20 percent of players will ever 'complete', by that meaning reach the end credits.

I just wanted to add something he missed: that some developers intentionally

over-design their games, knowing full well very few people will experience all the game has to offer. For example, the original *Deus Ex*, or the *Elder Scrolls* series "Shakes and moans in anticipation of playing *Skyrim*".

I think the issue of wasted length is most relevant to games with linear plot lines. Either players lose interest in the story or they hit a difficulty spike. Some JRPGs suffer from massive difficulty spikes in the last act – people like me can't always be bothered grinding until we level up enough to beat the final boss and watch the credits.

Angry Sackboy has a good point about trimming the bloat from the main plot line, but I am concerned that devs will create skeletal games, wait for the money to roll in, then sate the hungry masses with DLC. I'll be blunt. I don't like DLC. Especially DLC I'm expected to fork over cash for.

Besides that, do you think *Skyrim* – which is big and awesome and takes longer than two and a half hours to

complete – will ever be ported to the PS Vita? I remember some years ago the *PS Vita* was supposed to get an *Oblivion* spin-off which never eventuated.

Ambient Malice, via email

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim on a handheld?

Man, you just gave us goosebumps. We haven't heard any word yet about such a creature, but we'll certainly drop a sly email to Bethesda about it.

You're right about some games being deliberately over-designed, and though we incur Sack's wrath by saying this, a lot of us at *OPS* want as much content as we can get our discs. It's a rare day when DLC doesn't feel, at least partially, like a rort.

MY GOTY

Dear *OPS*,

My friends and I have been debating what game should win game of the year. The most furious debate has been about first person shooter of the year. All of my friends have said it is either *Battlefield 3* or *Modern Warfare 3* but they haven't even considered shooters that came out at the start of the year.

In my mind shooters like *Killzone 3*, *Crysis 2*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* and even *Resistance 3*. They gave us a different view of shooters. Instead of fighting Russians we were fighting aliens and the Helghast. I've read lots on *Deus Ex* and even that sounds a better than shooting Russians over and over again.

These are my contenders for shooter of the year. Thoughts?

Christian, via email

We can't tell you what we think just yet, and we're currently tallying the votes from you and other readers in our *OPS 2011 Game Of The Year Reader Awards*. Check next issue!

Cuttings

► If you don't ask...

Could I receive a mention in the magazine? That would be stupendous (I have been trying for years and years).
James Mitchell, via email

Boom.

► It's all out

I accidentally shouted Lydia off a cliff. It was hilarious until I realised she had several thousand bucks worth of ebony armour on her?
Che Patterson, via Facebook

That's okay. We left her in a cave with vampires.

► Winging it

Decided that *Assassin's Creed II* was sitting at 87% long enough. Now at 97%. Just need to find all these bloody feathers!
James Paine, via Facebook

That's longevity!

► Q&A

Just read that *GTA V* will be out in five months. Is this true or just crap?
Shane McDonald, via Facebook

Complete and utter crap. Could be, possibly, maybe by Christmas 2012. Maybe.

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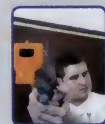
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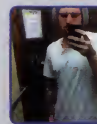
Warren Lolicato
Battlefield 3

"I heard it was good from one of my mates."



Nick Elliott
Batman: Arkham City

"This is a fantatstic sequel. If Rocksteady can top it then I would be amazed!"



Robert Nuhent
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

"So much sneaky, Snakey goodness!"



Anthony Perkins
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

"It'll blow you away."

Caption This ►

You put the words to the screen. Simple.

Alana Brennan one of the most annoying trends in gaming today, and turns it on its head. Just like King.

"See my new finishing move: the reverse T-bag."



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Plus, we also have four sets of PX3 headsets to give away. Wireless and rechargeable, these super-comfy headsets also come with programmable presets so you can tune the game just how you want it!

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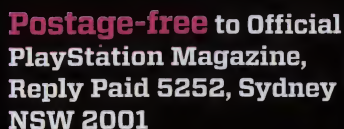
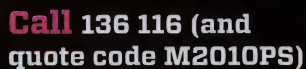
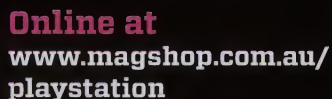
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M2010PS

in coming

This Month

- 32 Spec Ops:
The Line
- 36 Resident Evil:
Operation
Raccoon City
- 40 Gotham City
Impostors
- 42 Prey 2
- 44 Sly Cooper:
Thieves in Time
- 46 Ninja Gaiden III
- 47 Binary Domain
- 48 Game of Thrones



A cataclysm has struck Dubai, that shining beacon of man's wealth and decadence. Its gleaming mega-skyscrapers have been swallowed by sand, along with the city's residents, and the special forces unit sent to evacuate them.

Months later, Delta Force Captain Martin Walker and his two best men have been inserted into this dead metropolis to determine if Colonel John Konrad and his 'Damned 33rd' are still alive. What they find is a gauntlet of misery, a horror-show of torture and madness – and they learn soon enough that the architect of this terror is Konrad himself.

Not content to simply throw waves of his own men at our heroes, Konrad is also a sadist. Funnelled into a ruined freeway, Walker's squad stumbles upon two men strung up from an overpass; snipers' laser sights shine in from all sides. As Konrad coldly explains via walkie talkie, this sick display is a test.

"The civilian on the right stole water. A capital offence. The soldier on the left was sent to apprehend him. Which he did... killing the man's family in the process. Five innocent people are dead because these two animals couldn't control themselves.

"They are guilty. But what is justice? And how would you see it done?"

This is a Decision Scene, where the villain has given you two options, both of them unthinkable. Sure, you could try to do the right thing. You could try to take out the snipers. But it's so much easier to drink in the gravely ravings of a madman, and to enforce his own warped idea of justice.

"This is an order, Captain. Who lives? Who dies? Judge these men. Or pay the price of insubordination."

We recently met two of the men working on *Spec Ops: The Line* – associate producer Chris Thomas, and senior designer Shawn Frison. They took us through a hands-on session with their new take on the third-person cover shooter genre, and before long we had the answers to the big questions that everybody has been asking: does the world really need another military shooter? And what could another contender in this crowded genre possibly offer the public?

As it turns out, *Spec Ops* does offer something a little different: a contemporary tribute to *Apocalypse Now*. As Thomas explained, in-depth story-telling is a feature that has been sorely lacking in modern military shooters. "In that genre, most of the games are very action-packed; it's like a movie roller-coaster. You don't really have a deep connection with the characters. That's something that we're really proud of. That we've



The Line

Will you toe the line? Or will you cross it...

created a story that actually gives you that connection with the characters, and puts you in a lot of really, really tough situations.

"When you turn the game off, we want the game to stick with you. We want you to feel something."

It certainly stuck in our minds. The charred corpse pits, the knife-wielding psychos, and the playground where it all unfolds; an artificial canyon marked with off-kilter towers, carved into an ocean of sand like a titanic maw.

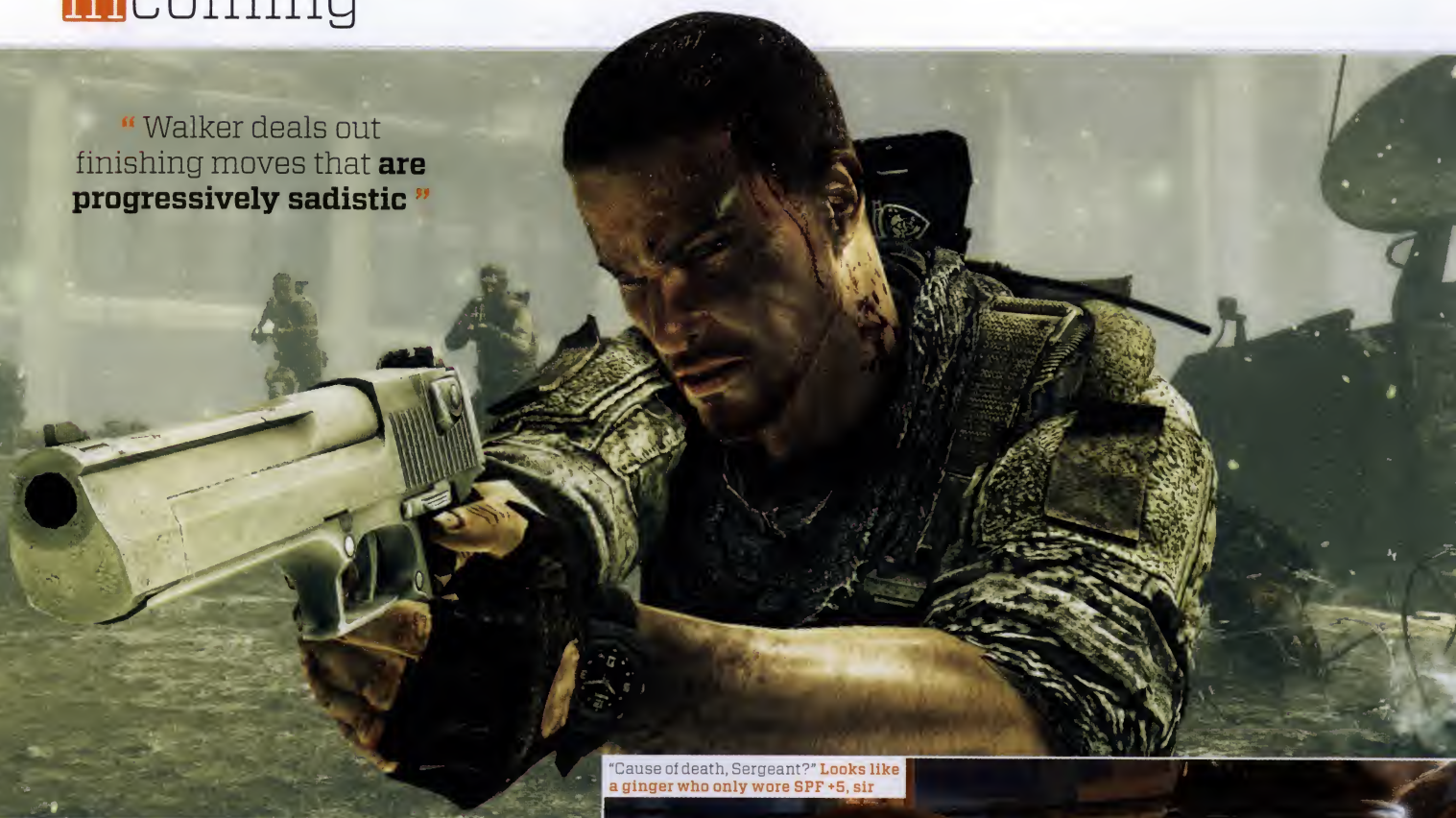
You control Walker directly, and you can issue contextual commands to his offshoots, the wise-cracking Ludo, and the steely Adams. The trio steers through linear environments: a crashed airliner with seats and crates scattered nearby, freeways littered with burnt-out cars, health club lobbies, and so forth. The standard elements of the cover shooter are all in place, but become grittier as you progress.

Likewise, our heroes go through a physical and mental transformation as they wade through Konrad's wicked works, accumulating filth and mental callouses. Preconceptions are tested, and shattered: at first Walker believes a force of bedraggled insurgents is the enemy, but he soon finds himself rubbing out American soldiers, all in the sway of their dark messiah.



Is this 'The Line' from the game's title? Inside sources told us "no, it's a metaphorical line, idiot." You heard it here FIRST

“ Walker deals out finishing moves that **are progressively sadistic** ”



“Cause of death, Sergeant?” Looks like a ginger who only wore SPF +5, sir



Why Dubai?

We asked associate producer Chris Thomas why this Middle Eastern resort hub was chosen as the games locale: “It’s just such a great backdrop for a game. It’s this larger-than-life, luxurious Utopia. In our version, of course, we’ve pretty much completely destroyed it. Just ravaged it with these sand-storms. And in some cases, entombed it. So you’ll have a lot of really great environments that are still preserved, these very luxurious places, within the buildings.”

“I think, thematically, it’s just a really cool place. On one side, it’s a testament to what man can create, with enough willpower, and enough resources. On the flip-side of that, it’s a monument to excess, and human ego.”

We also asked senior designer Shawn Frison whether they actually sought permission from the Dubai government to destroy their city in the game.

In a word: No.

“We’re actually still waiting to see what they say. We hope that they like it, but honestly, more than anything, we just wanted to tell our story. Hopefully they won’t be offended. We’re not making any sort of political statement. We’re mostly just trying to tell an interesting story, and we thought that was a cool place to set it.”



“ [The mission’s] kind of a unique situation, and we really wanted to explore that **dark moral territory that people have to go through** ”

Then there’s the execution moves. When you approach a mortally wounded enemy, you can tap a button to dispatch him; Frison and his team are quite proud of how Walker deals out finishing moves that are progressively sadistic. “The ones that he starts with, they’re fairly brutal, but they’re still semi-professional. He just gets rid of the guy.” But it doesn’t take long for things to get gruesome. “For instance, in mission nine, he has an execution where if you’re using a pistol, he puts his foot on the guy’s chest, and then shoots him in the knee, and then shoots him in the face. It gets more and more brutal, and more and more dark, as they go through all this stuff, and it starts taking its toll.”

We inquired if Walker will evolve to levels of sadism worthy of Phil Spector, but clearly Frison wants to leave a surprise or two for players who make it to the end.

“I... cannot comment on the final level. [laughs].”

He did note, however, that your squad starts to react to your degrading moral standards, and your professional relationship starts to come under strain. “Even just giving them commands, they’re going to respond to you differently.”

Beyond the overt tributes to Francis Ford Coppola’s cinematic masterpiece, and the book that inspired it, *Heart of Darkness*, Yager’s objective with this game was to give players a sense of the horrid choices that real-life soldiers often have to make. “Obviously, our version’s a little bit larger than life, and it’s kind of a unique situation, but we really wanted to explore that dark, moral territory that people have to go through.”

An unlikely outlet for the player’s wickedness is the sand itself. You can shoot out the windows of sand-filled buildings to bury your enemies alive. There are stages when a sand storm turns the screen a sickly dark red, leaving you unable to tell friend from foe. And there are more subtle features, too – levels where you can use sand effects to your tactical advantage. “When you throw a grenade onto sand, when it explodes, it’ll kick up a big cloud. That will stun guys, and blind them, so that while they’re bent over coughing, you can take ‘em out.”

“We also have these things called sand falls. You’ll see a hint of sand coming from the ceiling, and if you shoot it, a bunch will come down. That’s another way you can stun guys.”

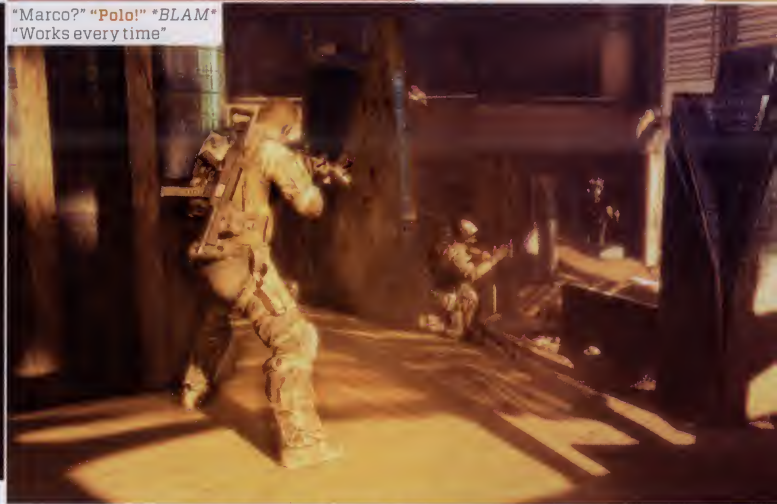


Beach front property fail


"Marco?" "Pololo!" "BLAM!"
"Works every time"

"Watch those page corners men,
don't get cut o- dammit, Johnson!"


Bitchin' audio cue: Little Richard Long Tall Sally



The game is built on the Unreal 3 Engine, and all of its well-known quirks reared their heads in the course of our hands-on session. To conceal level loading times, your men will often 'slow walk' from one killzone to the next; most of the rappelling sequences take a similar, leisurely pace.

The sand is handled via custom animation, yet it's not designed to be completely realistic. "We looked a little bit into doing a physical simulation, but honestly, it just wasn't as cool. Things never quite have the same impact, and you can't make things look as visually awe-inspiring, when it all has to be actually physically modelled. It makes it a lot more unpredictable. We went with the visually cooler, and more controllable approach."

As games go, *Spec-Ops: The Line* is highly linear, but it's also highly dynamic. Whenever we died and re-started, the gun battles played out quite differently. And as Frison explained, the realism of how the guns in the game behave has been tweaked to emphasise their differences – and their tactical possibilities. "Some of it is exaggerating the natural differences that are there. And almost every weapon has a secondary fire mode. The P-90 has a laser sight, the M-4 has a silencer, the HK-417 has a toggleable scope, and the SCAR has a grenade-launcher.

"Then there's just the fact that if you decide to go with a sub-machine gun or a shotgun, it's going to naturally favour a much more run-and-gun style of play. We've done some stuff to push it more in that direction." Usually in this game you don't see a cross-hair until you aim; yet the short-range, run-and-gun weapons always have one popped up, so you can more easily spurt your deadly lead while on the move. Back-story is revealed via chunks of intel you can pick up and read as you play, though this is entirely optional.

As for replay value, Frison was coy on whether player choices in those crucial 'Decision Scenes' will ultimately lead to alternate endings, though you'll definitely notice differences proportional to the level of moral turpitude you indulge in. "It's going to affect the way your squad reacts to you. And it's especially going to affect the scenario that you're in."

We saw this first hand. On our first attempt at the dilemma described in the opening

paragraphs, we tried to take out the snipers. This proved a tad too difficult, so on our second go we just shot the strung-up soldier in the head. Frison stressed that the cumulative effect of these scenes will serve to alter the flavour of the game. "When you made the decision to shoot the guy, Konrad called his men off, and essentially said 'thank you for your service.' That scene would definitely play out differently if you decide to disobey him.

"I think that's going to go a long way for replay value. Checking out how these scenarios play out."

While the subject matter is fantasy, Yager sought to give the project an authentic flavour. To that end, they enlisted the services of a special advisor, a former US Army special forces operative who now does private security for the State Department.

Frison and his team learned a lot from this shadowy fellow, especially in the mo-cap recording sessions, where he would chastise the actors for their sloppy tactics. He gave pointers on weapon animations, on how soldiers deal with real-life sandstorms, and he even gave the German developers some intense lessons on authentic US military slang. "For instance, he taught me the difference between a magazine and a clip. A magazine's what the bullets go into, that go into the gun. A clip's not what people think it is. It's a fast-loader for a magazine, basically." Plus, some handy common phrases, such as attack commands. "He's like: 'You always want to keep it short and snappy!' So the standard is: 'Take 'em down,' 'take 'em out,' or 'put 'em down.'

"People also say 'Take 'em the F--K out.' That's not faster, but that's pretty much how people say it."

Spec-Ops: The Line is currently in internal beta at Yager; for want of a bit of spit and polish, the game is pretty much done. For all our prodding, Frison wouldn't share any details about the multiplayer mode, beyond his firm belief that it was going to be 'great' – and quite possibly a horrific odyssey of its own.

"I wish I could tell you more. Just from the population of guys who play a lot of multiplayer games, I think every game's a little bit of a journey into the nightmare of man's subconscious. Every T-bagging takes you to a dark place." **James Cottey**



Time for these guys to take a dir-er... sand nap.

They Say

"We're actually in a really similar position to Rocksteady, the guys that did *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. They released a PS2 game, and then disappeared for, like, six years, and then came out with something really cool. So, fingers crossed, hopefully we can replicate their success."

We Say

Launching a niche shooter in the off-season is a bold move, yet what we saw was promising. And brutal.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING

The Pitch

A video game remake of *Apocalypse Now*, where a special forces unit must assassinate a rogue colonel in a nightmare setting.

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION
DISTRIBUTOR: 2K
DEVELOPER: YAGER
EXPECTED RELEASE:
AUTUMN 2012
PLAYERS: TBA

"Have you guys seen any raccoons yet?
I was told there would be raccoons!"

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

We built Raccoon City on blood and bones

The Pitch

An action-heavy *Resident Evil* 'what if' chapter that lets you play as the bad guys

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

EXPECTED RELEASE: 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: CAPCOM

DEVELOPER: SLANT SIX

GAMES/CAPCOM

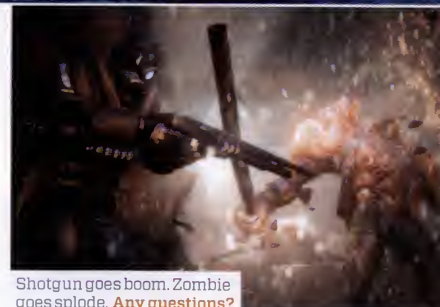
PLAYERS: 1-4

We take beef with any game that utilises artificial difficulty enhancers to increase tension or otherwise inflate the challenge. Controls, for instance, are one of the simplest but crucial facets of any game that determine, from the outset, how well players will be able to engage with a title. When it comes to the *Resident Evil* series, our biggest gripe has been the cheap trick of creating tension via an inability to move and shoot simultaneously. Punish us on weapon accuracy for trying to run and gun, but don't remove the option entirely because initial scariness tends to eventually lead to disconnected frustration.

With *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* Capcom has finally listened to our outcries. You will be able to run and gun in the next *Resident Evil* outing, but that's only the very beginning of the cool. Four-

player drop-in/drop-out co-operative play and a competitive multiplayer mode that sounds interesting on paper help to further raise the excitement bar. But by far the coolest part of *Operation Raccoon City* is that you get to fight as Umbrella Security Service officers.

Yup, you read it correctly, you get to play as the bad guys and dabble in some major what if-ness in this spinoff title that's set during the events of *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. You'll have a chance to fight good heroes such as Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield, but you'll also be fighting America's Spec Ops forces. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to contain the t-virus and cover up the Umbrella cockup. Developer Slant Six Games has also steered quite a way away from the previous games' measured tempo, focusing instead on a faster paced action affair.



Shotgun goes boom. Zombie goes splode. **Any questions?**

There's also a new cover system. The main thing we're a bit iffy about with this cover system, though, is that it's automated, in that you don't press a button to snap into cover. Instead, the game 'intuitively' does this for you when you're near an item of cover. Risky! At least they've included the ability to lay down blind fire on the waves of undead foes.



Picking Your Braaaains

We chew the undead fat with Mike Jones, Producer of *Raccoon City*

How many different characters/classes/roles are there to play?

The Umbrella Security Service (USS) squad is made up of 6 characters, each their own unique class: Lupo (assault), Vector (recon), Spectre (surveillance), Bertha (medic), Four Eyes (field scientist), and Beltway (demolition). We've also got a lot of other playable characters to announce soon so stay tuned!

Does the experience cross over through solo/co-op/multiplayer?

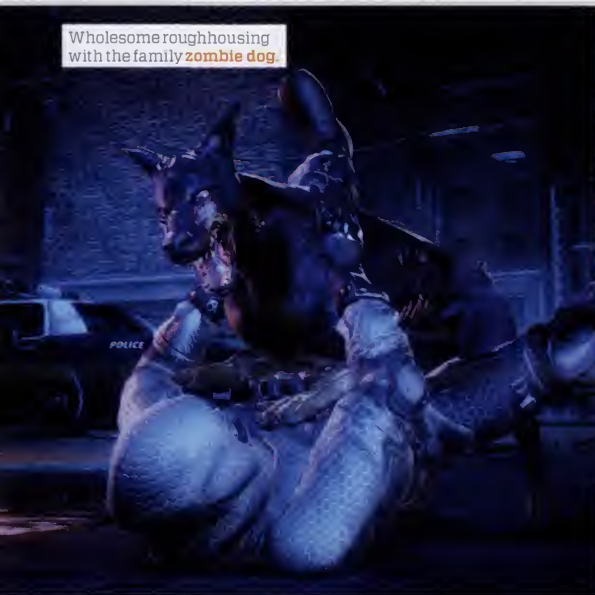
Yes. Any weapons you unlock or skill that you upgrade can be carried over from co-op to multiplayer and vice versa.

Is there a shop, can you sell or purchase/unlock new weapons? If not, how would we get new hardware?

The same menu system you use to select which skills and weapons to use is also the same interface you use to purchase new abilities and equipment – so it's very simple to navigate and use.

Are the levels linear, like traditional *Resident Evil*, or do they branch off and adapt?

The missions are pretty focused but there is a lot of player choice in that you get to determine what type of squad you put



Wholesome roughhousing with the family **zombie dog**.



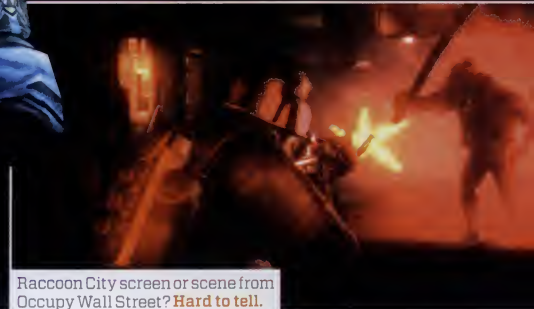
You should get that shoulder seen to, man. **Looks infected.**



"Good work, gas mask guys. **There're cookies and milk in the kitchen.**"



"Will you kids please **KEEP IT DOWN?** I'm trying to sleep up here!"



Raccoon City screen or scene from **Occupy Wall Street?** **Hard to tell.**

Thankfully, unlike previous *Resident Evil* games, ammo and weapons are in abundance and, as far as we could tell, so is health. Better yet, the problematic single-option melee system of *Resident Evil 5* has had a hit of steroids and is now actually useful. You'll now be able to lash out in all directions, performing classy executions and shattering undead skulls

with deadly precision.

Which is handy because you really don't want to get bitten. Slant Six Games has cleverly included an infection mechanic that will eventually turn you into one of the undead if you don't cross that t-virus out of your system. To purge the creeping undead virus, you'll have to rely on finding antiserum or hope that your

teammates feel generous enough to share some with you. Either way, you'll have to move fast or your brothers in arms will be forced to put you down.

Speaking of brothers in arms, you'll have the option of choosing from six characters, and in single-player you'll be able to choose which three characters make the cut for your four-person team. ▶

together and how you approach each encounter. We also have a very dynamic AI spawning system to keep you on your toes and so that no two playthroughs ever happen exactly the same way.

Can you upgrade your characters?

You don't level up your characters per se, but you do unlock their specific abilities and skillsets. So the more you invest in each individual character or class the more powerful/versatile they become.

What happens when you're infected and can't get a cure in time?

I'm glad you asked. You have a couple of options if one of your team gets infected by a zombie or other creature and you can't cure them in time. A) You can pump

them full of lead and "put them out of their misery" so they can respawn faster or B) you can slowly let them turn into a zombie at which point they will lose control and turn on you and attack your team. So sometimes it actually helps to KILL your teammates in certain situations. Brutal, right?

If a player dies is there any way of bringing him back?

Yes. If you are playing co-op, you have an opportunity to revive a downed teammate. The only time you get a "You Died" screen or have to restart a checkpoint are when ALL of your teammates have been downed or killed.

Is the game drop in/drop out?

Yep! There's also a super-handly squad

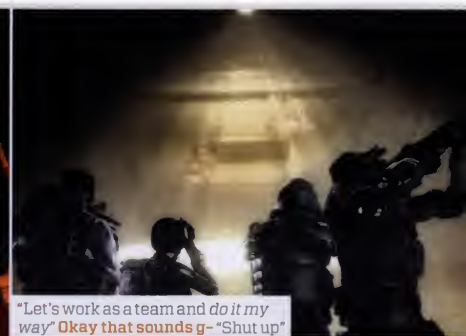
system to you can use to stick with your friends in co-op or competitive multiplayer.

How adaptive are the AI? Do they work together?

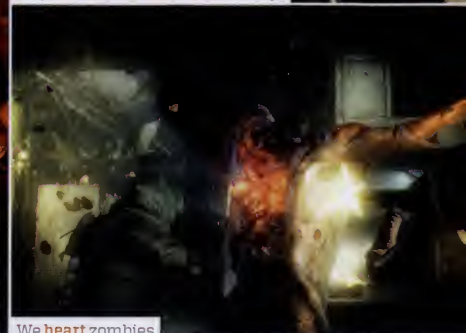
It's quite adaptive thanks to what we're calling an AI "overseer" that'll keep you on your toes. It will dynamically spawn enemies based on combat situations and yes — zombies and other creatures will group together to attack your team strategically. Actually, each of the key ▶



"On the third date with the Licker he set my world and joins on fire"

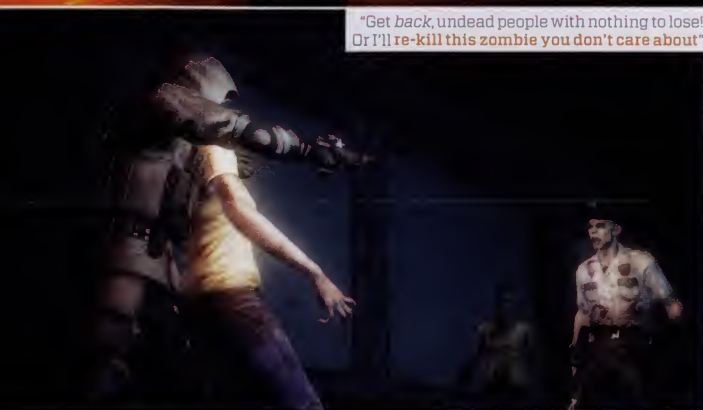


"Let's work as a team and do it my way" Okay that sounds g- "Shut up"



We heart zombies

"Get back, undead people with nothing to lose! Or I'll re-kill this zombie you don't care about"



Fat-ass taking cover behind small obstacle Champagne comedy



"To purge the creeping undead virus, you'll have to rely on finding antiserum, or hope that your teammates feel generous enough to share some..."

Each of the six characters has their own speciality. Vector is a recon expert with a Predator-like cloaking ability, Spectre is the resident sharpshooter and surveillance pro, while Beltway likes to blow shit up. Then there are the ladies of the group with science geek Four Eyes, loud-and-proud assault gal Lupo and Bertha whose job it is to patch everyone up.

To add some depth to the squad-based shooter, the Slant Six Games/Capcom combo has also included the ability to set an active or passive skill for yourself and your teammates (see 'Got skillz'?), Smashing your way through a level will reap precious experience points that can be used to upgrade yourself, your AI teammates, or let you purchase new weapons. Taking the time to complete side quests such as collecting evidence, destroying computer servers and finding hidden stuffed raccoons will increase the income.

There's also quite a range of enemies you'll be shooting your way through. Those infected with t-virus will be standard zombie

fare, while the American Spec Ops forces are set to pose more of a long-range threat. Unfortunately, from what we've seen to date, it doesn't look as though the AI is terribly bright. While it seems paradoxical to suggest that the zombies should have intelligence, they look like geniuses compared to the lazy cover-hating Spec Ops action shown to date.

Much like *Left 4 Dead*, enemy positions will be somewhat randomised—specifically when it comes to some of the flesh-eating mini-bosses—and you can also expect a certain level of randomisation when it comes to item positions. So if you're sprinting for that next herb or health spray that was around the corner last time you played a particular level, you may be sorely disappointed and quickly visiting the respawn screen.

Those of you looking for specific hits of nostalgia will love that some of the known environments from *Resident Evil 2* will make an appearance. We spotted Central street, the street left burning by

enemy types has their own unique behaviour set and selects targets differently. The hunter for example will single out the most powerful person on the battlefield and pounce after them — lickers try to pick up the stragglers, etc.

We've seen Leon Kennedy in the trailer, but will we see Claire Redfield, or even Jill Valentine?

Claire is definitely in the game. And all I can say about Jill and the rest of the cast is that we've still got some aces up our sleeve to talk about in the next few months.

Does the multiplayer feature any objective game modes?

Yes — we have a few unique game modes specific to Operation Raccoon City. We'll be talking more about multiplayer starting next year.

What weapon upgrades are you implementing?

There isn't a weapon upgrade system but you are able to unlock a whole host of weapons for use in both multiplayer and in campaign. Most of the "upgrades" apply to skills and abilities for different classes.

What elements are in *ORC* that will appeal to the old-school *Resident Evil* player?

Well, for one being able to relive the

events of *RE2* and *RE3* on current gen systems is pretty rad. Also, we've got all the fan-favourite characters, enemies and bosses making appearances, so there are lots of cool targets to shoot at. One of the smaller touches that I personally enjoy is the classic "item pickup" sound effect — love that sound!

Conversely, how do you appeal to the gamers who've never touched a *Resident Evil* game before?

The main thing for us was to create a bit of a new breed of third person shooter (TPS). If you're tired of the same old TPS gameplay *Operation Raccoon City* not only offers interesting squad-based shooter gameplay, but unique enemy types as well as military enemy type which creates our





Got skillz?

While the team are keeping a lot of the accessible active/passive skills close to their chest, we have seen the result of a few of Four Eyes' skills in action. Program Infected is sure to be a popular choice as it lets her temporarily control an infected enemy. Biometric Vision offers an enhanced viewing mode that makes it easier to spot infected enemies and, better yet, highlights their weak points. A third choice called Attraction Pheromone lets you target a single enemy and make infected enemies swarm towards them.



"Knife to see you"

the oil truck that decimates Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield's car in the opening cinematic, about a block or so away from the Gun Shop Kendo. We also spied a joint street to Central Station, where Jill Valentine makes her escape via Raccoon's Tram system in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.

Other nerd-boner moments include being around to overhear Leon and Claire shouting to each other after the truck crash, as they

re-create dialogue from the *Resident Evil 2* opening.

We're keen on this, but hoping that Slant Six Games and Capcom use their remaining development time to work on the AI. Beyond that, you can count us as excited about the prospect of a run-and-gun action-heavy derivative experience in the *Resident Evil* universe. **Nathan Lawrence**

"3-corner conflict" system that makes our action gameplay unique. The game is fast, it has a great co-op experience and has a pretty fresh take on a few of our competitive multiplayer modes – so if you're looking for a new action experience, look no further.

Resi's famous for having puzzles that complement the action-horror. Will we have to collect pieces of a pendant to unlock a door?

Operation Raccoon City's main focus is the TPS gameplay so there's less emphasis on puzzle solving this time around. There are still a few "treasure hunt" type sequences where you and your team have to work together to proceed.

We've heard that you can pick your teammates for each mission. Are you

able to pick a different playable character for each mission, too?

Yes – you can freely choose which characters you would like to play as. And if you clear through the campaign you're able to replay any of the missions with any of the characters as well. In other words, story progress isn't just assigned to one character at a time.

Can you give your teammates instructions, beyond "I'm down, help me!", such as "go here, shoot that"?

No. We wanted to keep the gameplay quick and tight. So we didn't want to go down the path of having to micromanage your squad AI. I, for one, hate babysitting NPC characters when I'm playing a game. So we didn't want to bog players down with that.

They Say

"*Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* delivers a true third person team based shooter experience set within the dark and sinister *Resident Evil* universe."

We Say

The ability to run and gun has us very excited about a fast-paced action title in the *Resident Evil* universe, but they really need to work on the AI. Like, honestly, a lot.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING





Gotham City Impostors

"Because I'm not wearing hockey pads"

The Pitch

Super zeroes • guns = hoedown

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: SHOOTER

EXPECTED RELEASE:

JANUARY 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER

BROS.

DEVELOPER: MONOLITH

PLAYERS: 1-12

Cool Concept

Warner Bros. weren't the only ones taken with the brilliance of this spin-off idea. The "impostors" concept has been given the seal of approval by DC Comics and legendary scribe Jim Lee. Lee liked the idea so much, he went back to DC and wrote up an entire storyline for Detective Comics based around Monolith's "impostors" angle.

Much like the crazy, wannabe vigilantes it depicts, *Gotham City Impostors* is a weird wolf in sheep's clothing. Developed by Monolith Productions, this is essentially a multiplayer-focused shooter set in the universe of DC Comics' Batman. Ordinarily this would be odd choice of genre, given Batman's well documented aversion to senseless murder (gun-based killing especially), but this is where the "impostors" part of the title comes in.

Think of this as a "what if" where *Team Fortress 2* meets *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. You and your mates play the role of normal (and we use the word lightly) Gotham City residents who have decided to do their part to either aid or thwart the metropolis' rising crime situation. Operating completely apart from the diabolical influence of the Clown Prince of Crime and the Dark Knight, mobs of Joker-themed criminals (Jokerz) and Bat-obsessed vigilantes (Batz) have taken it upon themselves to blast the hell out of one another. Clearly you don't need to have your own room in Arkham Asylum to be nuts in this town.

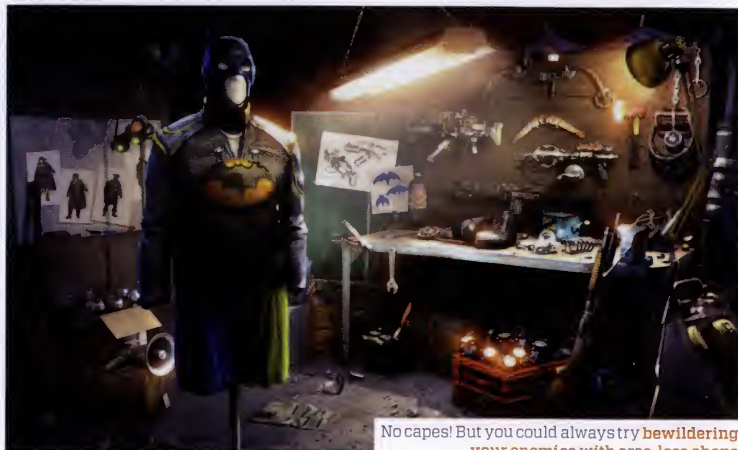
The good news is that this shooter packs more customisation than you can shake a shotgun at; you get to choose

the guns, gadgets and even the hairdos that fit your personality and play style. It doesn't matter if you want to be a mighty musclemen in budgie smugglers with a hunting bow, or a lithe lass packing a homebrew rocket launcher and glider wings, *Gotham City Impostors* does not box you into rigid character classes, nor any semblance of sanity. As you can no doubt see from the accompanying screens, this is clearly not a dark and

gritty interpretation of Gotham. *Impostors* revels in its colourful and over-the-top visual style, and features a number of cool combative arenas that you've secretly always wanted to shoot people in, such as an amusement park.

Speaking of aesthetics, the body type of your character isn't necessarily windowdressing stuff. Much like *Brink* your avatar's preselected physique – Speedy, Nimble or Tough – determine a number of attributes on the battlefield. During our time with the game we gravitated more towards the Nimble type, which automatically made us a female, and enabled zippiest running speeds and a noticeably higher jump than the competing types. For the record, we did spot two additional locked body types, and we genuinely hope they end up being "stick insect" and "morbidly obese".

Once you've got your do-gooder or harlequin weirdo set up, you can count on evolving them for a very long time to come. A robust level up system lets you



"To the Batmobile!" You mean our Toyota Starlet? "...Yes"

"There's a certain maniacal joy to be had from clocking somebody with a boomerang or a massive hatchet"



Scotsman! Na Na Na Na Na Na Na, Scotsman!

unlock all the items required to make your impostor as ludicrous as you desire. Monolith is promising a, frankly stupendous, 1000 levels of player advancement that will be overflowing with upgrades and idiosyncrasy.

Impostors includes both conventional guns and outlandish weapons, such as a grenade fashioned like a jack-in-the-box and a rocket launcher made of PVC piping. You'll be able to get your mitts on gadgets such as grappling hooks, rollerskates and a veritable pyromaniac's stash of explosive devices. Fitting with the theme of "wannabe" super-people, a lot of these items are hilariously hodge-podge designs that look like they're one use away from epic failure.

Though this game is primarily multiplayer-focused, you can develop your impostor on your lonesome by proving your prowess in solo challenges designed to test your skills and reflexes. Generally speaking though, you'll spend most of your time bat-ting your way to the top of the scoreboard in several delightfully over-the-top multiplayer modes.

One favourite is the capture the flag variant "Psychological Warfare". As per usual it involves two teams trying to bring an item back to their base and defend it, but the twist comes when the object is used to power a loudspeaker that praises your team for being ahead in points, or mercilessly trolls you if you're losing. Another twist on a familiar favourite is "Fumigation" which is a king of

the hill mode that is made extra hectic by the inclusion of Smilax gas and swarms of bats.

So how does a match in *Impostors* feel? Chaotic and surprisingly slick. It's hard not to be pleased with the quick traversal and verticality of the maps on offer. To begin with we were scooting and shooting on the ground like boobs, until we learned how to blitz about on batwings and trampolines.

There's also something to be said for the bat-shit insane weaponry on offer that straddles the line between the plausible and improbable. Sure, you have guns that react and perform just as well as they would in any *CoD* game, but there's a certain maniacal joy to be had from clocking somebody with a boomerang or a massive hatchet. Better yet, every kill causes a custom-created calling card to appear on your victim's screen. You've got phallus mail!

From what we've seen of *Gotham City Impostors* so far, it is looking like something of a sleeper hit. Beneath the dodgy veneer of black hockey pads and horrendous make up is a shooter experience set to deliver everything its big budget brethren do. If you're keen for some Bat-action but you're not interested in replaying *Batman Arkham City* (for the third time), *Impostors* could be just the thing to put a smile on that face of yours. **Adam Mathew**

Because some men just want to see your pancreas burn



Tubes have never been noober than this



They Say

"We really wanted to let the player customise everything they could possibly want to about their character, from weapons to body, to play style."

We Say

Why so serious? This is insane amounts of fun and well worth a look.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING



A textbook example of someone with an unhealthy Boba Fett-ish

Prey 2

We got to prey just to make it today

The Pitch

Everybody runs in this bounty hunting shooter

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: SHOOTER

EXPECTED RELEASE:

TBA 2012

DISTRIBUTOR:

BETHESDA

SOFTWARES

DEVELOPER: HUMAN

HEAD STUDIOS

PLAYERS: 1

If *Mass Effect 2* and *Mirror's Edge* were crossbred the end result would be a beautiful child called *Prey 2* - or a hideous mutant called 'Mass's Edge'. Inheriting the free-running, shooter sensibilities of its mater, and the sci-fi coolness of its pater, *Prey 2* looks like an offspring destined for great things.

Many of you already know the basics; you're Killian Samuels, a U.S. Marshall alien-abductee who turns bounty hunter on a planet not unlike *Star Wars'* Coruscant. Sporting some serious memory gaps between the time he was snatched and the time he suddenly became Boba Fett, Killian must roam the megalopolis called Exodus in an effort to find answers (and score some sweet, sweet moolah from bounties).

Killian initially believes himself to be the only ex-pat Earthling until he runs into Domasi "Tommy" Tawodi (the Cherokee protagonist of the original *Prey*), whom he has apparently met in the period he no longer remembers.

According to developer Human Head,

Tommy doesn't just have a token cameo here. Your paths cross several times throughout the game, and though you'll never fight alongside him as a partner, we're told he's an integral part of the proceedings. Clearly a fair chunk of the story will revolve around finding out what you and Tommy were up to in the time period blacked out by Killian's bout of Alzheimers. We're predicting wacky 'dude, where's my spaceship' shenanigans ensue.

While we're on the topic of narrative, though *Prey 2* offers a considerable open-world expanse to explore this will be a one-size-fits-all story. Human Head says it has a dedicated tale it wants to tell and that it won't branch off in different directions. There will, however, be side-questing and a palpable, trackable reputation system to tinker with. Stomp through Exodus' streets like a colossal space prick (by shoving people, killing innocents and talking like Zapp Brannigan) and you shouldn't expect people to shout you a round of blue milk at the local cantina and ask for your help.

Conversely, if you're a do-gooder who helps out when aliens are getting mugged and so forth, your reputation will go up. Reputation will affect things in the mid-term and short-term, like how the local law will react to you, or if vendors give you sweet discount action. Obviously, if you're a stone-cold killer who shoots aliens down (just to watch them die), then things will turn ugly faster than a Jabba the Hutt sex tape.

One thing is for certain, if word about your rampant douchebaggery does travel throughout Exodus, it'll have a long way to go: this place is Deathstar huge. From what we've seen there will be distinct parts of the planet to explore; a brighter side unshaded by orbiting planets, a much darker area stuck in perpetual eclipse and then there's the rainy 'Bowery' area situated between the two. Human Head has done this

"It's a trap! My underpants can't repel fear of this magnitude"

When in doubt, jazz hands your way out of trouble

"BOWLING! Get your alien bowling!
We've got red hot deals today, sir!!"

"You shouldn't expect people to shout you a **round of blue milk at the local cantina**"



Should have shot first, buddy.
Like Han most certainly did



"I'm Commander Shepard, and this is my favourite alien in a pimp suit on the Citadel"

both to offer environmental variety and to better signpost suburbs for the player. The developer is also avoiding any instances of 'locking players out' of an area once the main narrative purpose has been exhausted there.

As an interstellar bounty hunter you'll be retiring more fools than a trigger-happy Bladerunner. To do this you'll need to rely upon 20 odd gadgets with over 40 upgrades to further augment them with. The number of toys you can carry at one time is limited and Human Head is doing this deliberately with a purchasing ability restriction. A normal run through the game won't entitle you to nab every single gadget by the time the credits roll, which means you'll have to make definite choices as to which gadgets and strategies you want to dedicate yourself to. Should you prefer to sidle up close, then stealth and melee gadgets will be your bag. If you like causing distance-based (and collateral) damage, stick with the grenade gadgetry.

Obviously, the other important tools of the trade are your eclectic mix of upgraded Earthen firearms and alien zappers. At this stage it seems that there will be no upgrade system set in place for your weapons, rather Human Head is promising a large number of individual guns. Many of these shooters will offer further tactical benefits in the form of specialised, bizarre ammo types, or helpful secondary functions.

You'll need all the firepower you can get, too. Sliding into the rad rocket-powered boots of a bounty hunter means chasing down your marks, just as much as it does disintegrating them. Mercifully, we've been informed that the the route of escape taken by each individual prey won't be scripted exactly the same every time. It's understood that there will be particular set piece spots that Human Head will want to funnel us towards in order to deliver some roller-coaster moments, but otherwise the quarry may trip you up in smaller ways.

They might goose-step you by scrambling up a different building, crashing straight through it, or teleporting past it completely – how they react all depends on how you try to shut them down. Also, for those of you concerned about getting lost along the way, it's worth noting that though it wasn't shown in the E3 demo, a handy mini-map is now present.

No matter which way you size *Prey 2* up, it's looking as alluringly acquirable as one of the big fat bounties it depicts. If Human Head can deliver intelligent enemy AI and a fleshed out universe on par with *Mass Effect 2*, we'll happily take up residence (and down residents) in this wretched hive of scum and villainy.

Mark our words and mark them well: this is space you ought to be watching.

Adam Mathew

The fail trail explained

If a bounty escapes during a mission you will get a fail screen and then you'll go back to the checkpoint and be able to restart from there. Human Head has said it doesn't want to lock out content because of player failure. If a story mission is giving you grief you can abort it and go back to causing trouble in the overworld.

That said, there are some exceptions to this sort of leniency. If one of your side-quest bounties escapes, they're pretty much a dot on the horizon, slick. *Prey 2* will not let you reset back to try that particular ambient challenge again, though that bounty may show up again later in your travels. Revenge will be so sweet.

They Say

"We want to push the envelope of what's in a first-person shooter, take you to a new location and let you do things you've really not done before."

We Say

And we want to LET you.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING



Take it from us, flambé raccoon **is good eatin'**



The power of Grayskull made everybody its bitch



The red ring of death had finally made its way onto **another console**

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

Chrono-illogical

The Pitch

Bits of *Assassin's Creed* and bits of *inFamous*

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE

EXPECTED RELEASE:

TBA 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: TBA

DEVELOPER: SANZARU

PLAYERS: 1

Despite Sly Cooper's world being cel-shaded there's a lot to appreciate here, especially when he's on the move.

Sneaking up on an enemy the light-fingered mammal hunkers down, tail flicking as he anticipates lifting his target of an important item. Jumping from precarious point to point that tail moves fluidly and adds a whole heap of character to what you'd take as a fairly straightforward-looking action adventure.

However it is a gorgeous-looking world; a cartoon that's come to life but bolder and more mature than before. Environments are still presented with thick black lines and bold solid colour, and everything's exaggerated but the action's very precise. Poles may comically bend and lean under Sly's weight and force of jumping on them, but he's never out of control as he bounds from point to point. Ezio and Drake may define the rules of movement in a space but Sly does it with undeniable charm.

Fans of the series will notice that the characters have evolved whilst still keeping

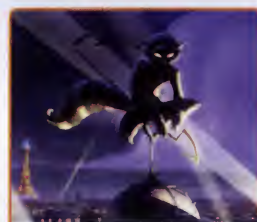
their spirit, and some of this is due to new developer Sanzaru taking on the project. They took care of the remarkable *Sly Cooper HD Collection* that was released earlier this year so they're familiar with the series.

Despite being relative newcomers Sanzaru are delving into Sly's past, sending him back in time to rescue his ancestors from a deviant who's messing with timelines. In feudal Japan, Sly has to free master ninja Rioichi from a cage, but first needs to find multiple pieces of a special armour to disguise himself in order to get into the castle. It's more than a visual device, as the armour also protects him from fire-based attacks. The downside is that it's heavy and impedes his movement.

While the time travelling mechanic explains Sly's heritage, you'll also get to take control of the people you need to rescue in their own themed stages. Though the bulk of the game is focussed around Sly himself, parts of the levels can only be accessed by his ancestors and their own special skills.

Rioichi, for example, owns a sushi shop that's was taken over when he was thrown in jail, and has to collect pieces of cutlery from wandering guards. Although Sly's learned how to perch on tall spires from the pages of *Thieveus Racoonus*, a tome handed down through the Cooper clan, he won't be able to master one of Rioichi's signature moves that allows the ninja to nimbly access areas that Sly is unable to reach.

Whilst Sanzaru are keeping quiet about the extent of all the stages we do know you'll also head into an ancient Egypt themed stage amongst others. Regardless, Sly's one of those characters that feels at home on PlayStation, and based on what we've seen it looks like he's about to make a fine return. **Paul Taylor**



McMassive

In respect to the free-roaming, like its predecessors *Sly 2: Band of Thieves* and *Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves*, *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time* boasts environments twice the size of what has gone before. It's so huge, you've now got a compass on L3.

They Say

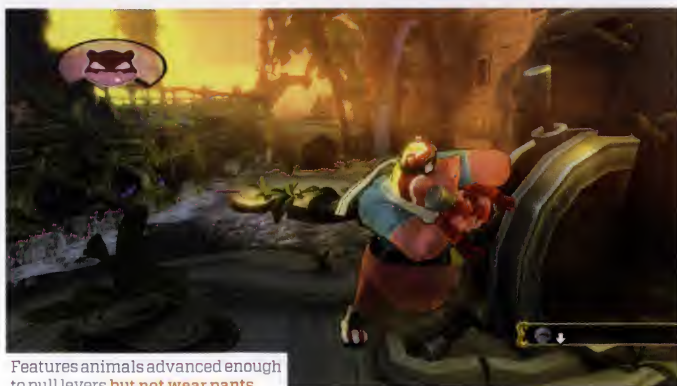
"Obviously working on the *Sly Cooper HD Collection* has helped a great deal. Touching up all those games in minute detail really let us see the features that we wanted to bring up in a fourth game."

We Say

Short of having Sucker Punch itself step up to the plate, this is the best way to make a *Sly* sequel.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING



Features animals advanced enough to pull levers **but not wear pants**



PlayStation
Network

dancestarparty.com

From the makers of
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DanceStar PARTY

JOIN THE DANCESTAR™ PARTY!

Dance, sing and create your own moves in 40 real music videos. Expert or beginner, everyone can join the DanceStar™ Party. Only for PlayStation®Move.

PG

Mild themes
and sexual
references

**PlayStation Move
REQUIRED**

**YOU'LL
NEED
THESE**



PS3

PlayStation 3

SONY
make.believe



Not pictured: inner torment, profound guilt

Ninja Gaiden III

The days of our knives

The Pitch

Hack-n-slash with a conscience

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

EXPECTED RELEASE:

TBA 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

DEVELOPER: TEAM NINJA

PLAYERS: 1-8

This latest in the *Ninja Gaiden* series represents a seismic shift in a few ways. Series creator, the incomparable Tomonobu Itagaki, left Tecmo Koei in 2008 after the end of *Ninja Gaiden II*, leaving development in the hands of Yosuke Hayashi on Team Ninja. Itagaki has a reputation for being strong headed and forthright in his opinions on games – both his own and those made by other developers – and we get the feeling it was his way or no way at all in the development cycle on *Ninja Gaiden II*.

The change of creative lead doesn't mean the end of a franchise – just look at *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time* and *Modern Warfare 3* for evidence of that – but it does let doubt creep into a punter's mind about what's going to happen in future iterations. We're the first to wonder how much flavour or spirit of the game will remain the same. The last two titles are renowned for being hard to beat with punishing mechanics, demanding patience but rewarding gamers with visceral combat. They're also very violent.

Now, though, the gore's been paired back. You're still a badarse ninja, flipping out and zipping around the screen, slicing up fools, but the expected (and stomach churning) dismemberment's been given the chop. The official line from the developer is that they "don't think people want to see that anymore ... [gamers have] already seen it."

The focus is on Ryu Hayabusa, the man behind the actions. Part three is more philosophical, ultimately questioning why Hayabusa does what he does, and there's more emphasis placed on story than ever before. To that end, there's going to be a super-easy mode for newcomers that'll handily take care of all the blocking so they can focus on attacking and working through the narrative. Sure, the previous games have been followable yarns, but they're

hardly the reason why we booted them up. Ryu's turned dark, and his possessed arm is forcing him to kill humans, rather than just the regular demons. And that's about it.

Team Ninja also want you to feel empathetic, and know what it's like to take a (digital) life. Enemies plead for mercy, asking for help; it's slightly disconcerting at first, and on-screen the big hits finish by zooming in as Ryu performs some incredible acrobatics. At Gamescom this year, Hayashi revealed that the game would also incorporate Move as the game is "all about slicing and chopping through flesh and bone." We love Move when it's done right, but we're cautious about labelling this a fantastic control method.

We're being slightly pessimistic, but there are definite improvements too. Ninpo is being overhauled to be more powerful, and the melee combat system – the real draw card – is also being tweaked to be more fluid. Whatever the other changes bring, you can expect the hack and slash to be fantastic. **Paul Taylor**

They Say

"For the first time, we'll get a look at the world through Hayabusa's eyes, and find out what drives him to fight, and kill."

We Say

We thought that it was because he's a ninja, and he was wreaking vengeance over his dead clan. We hope the story doesn't get in the way of the epic swordplay for which the series is renowned.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE

NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

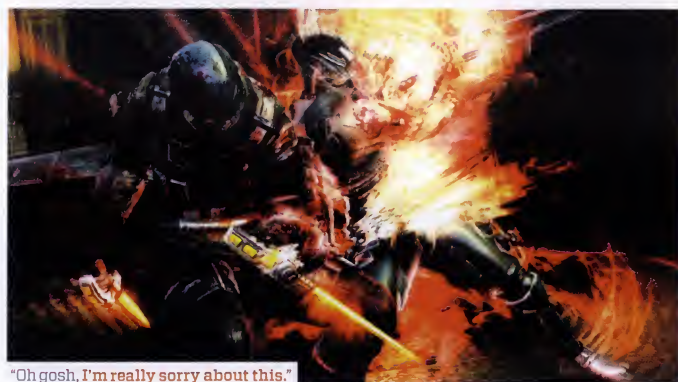
LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING

Where it's @

Team Ninja are prolific on Twitter. Check them out on @TeamNINJASTudio for a lot of news regarding *Ninja Gaiden III*, and also the next *Dead or Alive*. One of our favourites is "[t]he only way to heal yourself during battle is Ninpo. That's it. Hayabusa turns into a fire dragon and eats someone."



"Oh gosh, I'm really sorry about this."

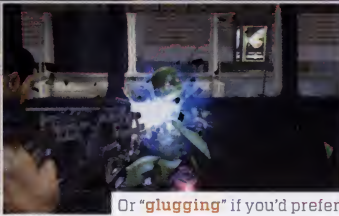
"Can you see the **check-in counter** anywhere?"

Binary Domain

A shooter with byte



Adventures in **gun lugging**



Or "**glugging**" if you'd prefer



Needs some **Cyber Mortein**



Attack of the **robo top-hats**

The Pitch

Guns + philosophy = rad?

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

EXPECTED RELEASE:

FEBRUARY 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: SEGA

DEVELOPER: YAKUZA STUDIO

PLAYERS: 1

Robots are tried and tested videogame baddies. Their shape and form has evolved over the years (hey, those animals you rescued in *Sonic The Hedgehog* were trapped in mechanical shells) but their intent is still darkly malignant, i.e. you are the enemy.

The structure of this new title by *Yakuza* creator Toshihiro Nagoshi is utterly familiar on paper, but with a tidy gameplay twist. It's the year 2080 and robots have evolved. Though they were initially designed to assist humans, the diabolical Amada corporation has secretly given the robots ego and emotion. Disguised to look like humans, these creations (dubbed 'Hollow Children') infiltrated all facets of human life – and now they threaten human kind.

So it's up to you as Dan Marshall and your squad to work together and blast the bots to bits. Pick three teammates before each mission based on their skill set and then take them to victory by being an effective leader. Toss in the words 'cover based squad shooter' and most people get the gist immediately, but the clever part is the Consequence System.

During the levels you'll need to command your team to advance, attack and defend your position, and each member has their own personality. It's up to you to get to know them in order to reap the best possible performance, else they'll be a mess on the battlefield, operating without direction. Treat them well and they'll respect you. Call them an idiot (that's actually an option), put them in situations where they'll end up with more bullets in them than bones and you'll lose their trust. Charge into battle and wipe out the mechanical menace and you'll be favoured by the cautious types. Get stuck after launching a brazen gung-ho attack and you could be out of ammo, trapped behind cover and in serious need of medical attention while the individuals on your squad look after themselves before giving you a moment of their time, despite your constant pleas for help.

Standard commands can be given via button combos on your controller, but there's also a voice-command system for those with a headset and the confidence to give vocal directions, alone in a room, without feeling like a chump for talking to your PS3. The last time we saw this in action the voice commands were a bit sketchy and only being recognised some of the time, though you can lob in unconventional phrases for a few surprises. Tell your team you love them and you should get an amusing response.

The Consequence System has bigger implications than just a cohesive team in the level, as the story will branch according to what happens in the level. We're not sure exactly how this will work, but we hope that it's enough to make *Binary Domain* more distinct. It looks graphically solid and we really like how bullets smack into metal, tearing shards off the chassises in the spot where they hit, though it's without the flair of Platinum Games' *Vanquish*. More soon.

Paul Taylor

They Say

"The keyword we have in mind for this project is 'Life'...this fundamental theme is something everyone knows but which the full extent of can be difficult to grasp."

We Say

Very philosophical, but this needs characters smarter than the archetypes we've seen so far. With good gunplay and smart tactics, this could be surprising hit.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING



"Ow, for god's sake, somebody turn down the **HDR bloom**."

"See my vest, see my vest, **forged from real dragon chest?**" ...Yes, m'lord

Game of Thrones

Winter is coming

The Pitch

A licensed RPG set in an internecine, pragmatic, cynical world. Fitting.

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION RPG

EXPECTED RELEASE: Q1 2012

DISTRIBUTOR: TBA

DEVELOPER: CYANIDE

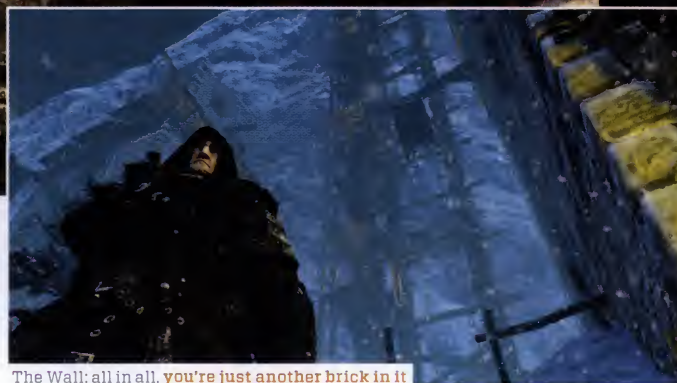
STUDIOS

PLAYERS: 1

We know what you're thinking; "a game about a game of thrones", that's meta. No arguments here. For those of you unfamiliar with it, the HBO series *Game of Thrones* has taken the TV world by storm recently, thanks to its impressive production values and the fact that it features one of the most captivating medieval fantasy worlds ever created. Now the hit franchise based off the novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* is set to invade your PS3.

For the record, this isn't the first game based off the books and TV show, as there was a halfway crap PC strategy title called *A Game of Thrones: Genesis* released earlier this year. Thankfully this new effort looks to be much more worthy of the license; firstly, because it's a swashbuckling action RPG, and secondly, unlike *Genesis*, this will actually focus on characters and events occurring in the TV series. That means we'll soon be ensconced in a world of bitterly antagonistic rival houses, deeply nuanced characters, intricate political machinations and breathtaking fantasy. Also; casual incest.

Little is known about how this new adventure will gel with the *Game of Thrones* narrative established by author George R.R. Martin, but



The Wall: all in all, **you're just another brick in it**

developer Cyanide Studios is trumpeting the fact that Martin is on board supervising an original plot.

Speaking of authenticity, the game will replicate familiar locations straight from the pages of the beloved fantasy saga and also include the likeness of some actors from the TV series. Here's hoping we'll be misadventuring alongside the smart-ass midget Tyrion Lannister (played to perfection by Peter Dinklage).

Gameplay-wise, Cyanide is promising 30-plus hours of action RPG, and we'll be roaming the gritty, medieval fantasy world of Westeros as one of two original characters. The first is a member of the Night Watch, the other a fallen aristocrat returning from exile and bearing a strange new religion. The combat is said to resemble *The Witcher 2*'s blend of live-action and turn-based gameplay and the journey will span numerous quests. Fingers are very much crossed that we can get our very own direwolf.

From the teaser info we've seen, this looks surprisingly authentic. Stand-out scenes included the majestic isolation felt whilst standing atop the Wall, or walking through the streets and alleys of King's Landing. It's early days yet, but it appears that we'll not simply be passing by these locations; there'll be ample chances to explore and interact with primary characters and learn previously unwritten, behind-the-scenes info about them.

Cyanide is also keen to remind us that key decisions and major events will have meaningful impact on Westeros, letting us see how the game world evolves over time based on actions or inactions.

Though we've been well burned before by the 'TV show to game' genre of games, we're holding onto a faint glimmer of hope with this one. George R.R. Martin is well known for being a perfectionist, and it's hoped that his direct involvement will raise the quality of this production considerably. Paint us very cautiously optimistic. **Adam Mathew**

They Say

"We didn't include a dedicated co-op mode on purpose. In our opinion we think typical adventure RPGs should be played alone."

We Say

Bah! What kind of loner loser-talk is that? All is forgiven if we get our own direwolf NPC pet. Make it happen, Cyanide.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE

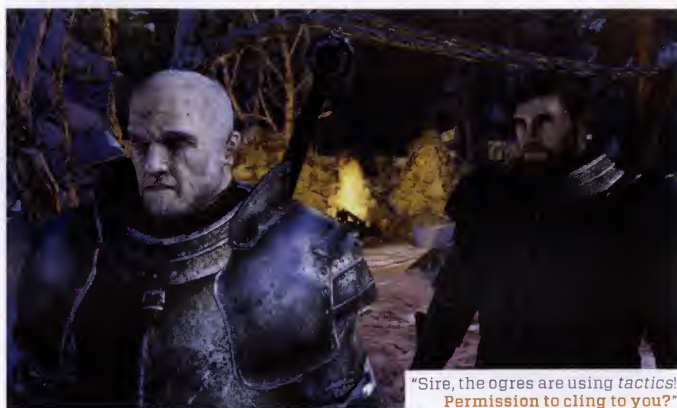
NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING



"Sire, the ogres are using tactics! **Permission to cling to you?"**

The uphill battle

While promoting the game, Cyanide has cited *Planescape: Torment*, *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Baldur's Gate II* as the inspirations for their own project. Despite the AAA name-dropping of its influences, Cyanide lacks experience and pedigree. Aside from the average effort that was *A Game of Thrones: Genesis*, the studio's background is mostly from sports management sims like *Horse Racing Manager*. Cyanide's only attempt at an RPG was 2007's *Loki: Heroes of Mythology*, which garnered less than amazing scores.

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CO-OPTIMAL GAMING

Your comprehensive guide to kick-arse co-op fun on the PS3

Despite the fact that we routinely murder each other by the millions, humans are fundamentally a co-operative species. As any evolutionary biologist worth their salt will tell you, our ability to work together to achieve common objectives is one of the key reasons we're at the top of the food chain. Our brains are wired to make us feel good when we help each other because helping each other is what makes us the most successful species on the planet.

What this means is that – scientifically speaking – co-operative multiplayer games are objectively superior to their more popular adversarial variants, and that people who enjoy adversarial multiplayer more than co-op are pretty much Neanderthals. No, no: don't bother to object. This is science we're talking about here, and knuckle-dragging, noob-fragging, proto-people aren't allowed to argue with science.

But don't worry – we're here to help. In this feature you will find a comprehensive rundown of the very best co-op experiences available on PS3, both online and offline. Even if you've never played a co-op game before, even if the very idea of co-operation is foreign to you, this feature will give you everything you need to get started. Uh... except other people to play with. Those you'll have to provide yourself. ►

DOS & DON'TS

DO get a decent headset – i.e. one that doesn't crackle with static every time you say something.

DO remember the golden rule: treat others as you would expect to be treated – be courteous, respectful, and helpful.

DO learn the basics before going online. It's okay to be a beginner, but at the very least you should understand the controls and overall goals of a game before trying to play it with other people.

DO play as a part of the team. Understand your role in the group and do your best to live up to the requirements of that role. If you're a healer, then play like one – that's the whole point.

DON'T put the headset mic so close to your mouth that it distorts your voice and makes you sound like a creepy mouth-breathing degenerate.

DON'T be a dick. Keep profanity to a minimum, refrain from abusing your teammates and adversaries, and never – NEVER – drop out of a game without telling people first. (Especially if you're hosting.)

DON'T be an elitist snob. Being good at a game doesn't give you the right to deride those whose skill level is lower than yours. Again: be helpful and polite – after all, we were all noobs at one point.

DON'T tell everyone how totally high you are right now. Nobody gives a shit.



BORDERLANDS

MAX PLAYERS: 4 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

Ah, *Borderlands*. A longstanding favourite here at the OPS office, Gearbox's vibrant post-apocalyptic shooter offers one of the most accessible and rewarding co-op experiences available on PS3 or any other platform. With four unique character classes to choose from and about a zillion different guns to use, *Borderlands* provides considerable scope for customisation, meaning you and your buddies can work together to develop your characters in a way that promotes cohesive and satisfying teamwork.

Since the number of enemies ramps-up depending on the number of players, the game's finely-tuned difficulty curve remains constant irrespective of whether you're playing as a duo, threesome, or foursome. The only downside is that quests completed in co-op sometimes won't count for progress in single-player... but then who's playing single-player anyway?

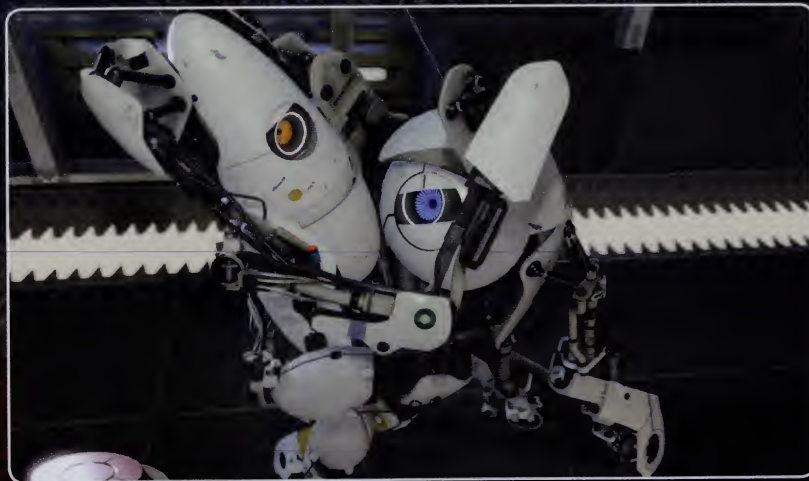
BATTLEFIELD 3

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: NO

While most people buy *Battlefield* games for the competitive multiplayer, *Battlefield 3* comes with a fairly robust co-op mode as well. There are only six maps available, but each has three difficulty levels and a variety of unlocks available, so there's incentive there to keep coming back.

Objectives vary dramatically across missions, as does the scope for co-operation: in some missions, like the one where you have to escape from an office complex while being pursued by security, it's possible to get by with a minimum amount of co-ordination between players. However, as the campaign progresses and the missions become more difficult, you'll find working together is not only beneficial, but necessary.

In this respect, co-op in *Battlefield 3* can be discouragingly difficult. Give it time, though, and you'll learn to appreciate its appeal.



PORTAL 2

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: NO

The genius of co-op in *Portal 2* is that it actively encourages players to sabotage each other at every available opportunity. It begins with accidents: one player presses a button a little early and their partner falls into a pit of fire. Whoops. Somebody picks up a crystal cube and inadvertently redirects a laser beam into their buddy's face. Whoops. But after a while, it starts getting less accidental. Eventually you just start doing it intentionally because it's funny. "Oh, did I put the portal above the acid bath AGAIN? Really sorry, man. Total accident, I promise."

It sounds horrible, but what you have to remember is that death is totally inconsequential in *Portal 2*. Respawns are immediate and there are no penalties for dying. And as cartoons have taught us for decades, death minus consequences equals hilarity. Especially when the ones dying are adorable robots.

FORGOTTEN GEMS

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

APPROX. PRICE ON EBAY: \$15-20



Tense, merciless, and compelling in a way that hasn't really been replicated since. The campaign is limited to two players, but there's also a four player Terrorist Hunt mode, which is actually quite a bit of fun. People are still playing it today!

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

APPROX. PRICE ON EBAY: \$5-10



A top-down dungeon-crawler with superheroes instead of wizards, *M:AU* is good old-fashioned dorky fun. The second one is better but still kind of expensive for some reason, so unless you can find it cheap, we say go with the original.



RESISTANCE 3

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: NO

Co-op in *Resistance 3* is straightforward and clean as a whistle: it's the single-player campaign, but with an extra person. And that's it. Sounds kind of dull, but thanks to the game's massive variety of weapons, cunning enemy AI, and tight level design, it's actually really enjoyable. Battles that felt a bit mundane in the single-player campaign are invigorated by virtue of the simple fact that it's more fun to kill things with a friend. (Wait, didn't Bert and Ernie sing something like that on *Sesame Street* once?)

It's not all good, though. To play online co-op in *Resistance 3*, you need to have an online pass. These are free when the game is purchased new, but cost 10 bucks if you have a pre-owned copy. Which... you know... kind of sucks.

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: NO

Unlocked after completing the single-player campaign (for some stupid reason), Spec Ops is *MW3*'s co-op mode and it is surprisingly awesome. We say "surprisingly" because – frankly – we weren't expecting much. As with *Battlefield*, competitive multiplayer is *CoD*'s forte, and everything else (including single-player) tends to feel like a tacked on extra. Not here!

Consisting of sixteen regular missions and 16 survival mode maps, co-op in *MW3* is meatier than Carrot Top's bollocks, which are apparently very meaty indeed. While survival mode is good fun for a while, the missions are where Infinity Ward's flare for clever design finds its fullest expression. Seriously, even if you hate *MW3*'s single-player and adversarial multiplayer, at least give Spec Ops a go. You might be surprised at just how much you enjoy it.



ROCK BAND 3

MAX PLAYERS: 7 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

Truth be told, *Rock Band 3* co-op is best played in a living room with other people. We're not sure what it is exactly, but there's just something about the experience that gets lost over the internet. That said, playing on the internet is still good times, provided you can get a decent connection. Trying your luck with randoms is always going to be a bit of a gamble, but if you can get three or four friends together and form a band, it can be an incredibly rewarding experience.

Take it seriously enough and it's almost like being in a *real* band, especially now that two of the peripherals – keyboard and pro guitar – are in fact actual instruments. You'd be surprised how invested some people are in it: weekly practice sessions, tournaments, the whole nine yards. No groupies, though.

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

MAX PLAYERS: 4 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

We decided to go with *LBP2* over its predecessor because of all the neat little features the sequel includes to make co-op a more enjoyable experience. For example, in *LBP2* you can play through the entire story with anyone on PSN, rather than just people on your friends list. You simply go to the world map, find a level populous with players, and jump in. Simple. Another nice new addition are the co-op specific puzzles, many of which require a surprising amount of dexterity and co-ordination to solve.

In the rush to praise the *LBP* games for their content creation tools – which are totally great, don't get us wrong – people sometimes forget that they're accomplished platformers as well. Not only that, but accomplished *co-op* platformers. That's not something you see very often, and is definitely worth checking out when you do.





SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

Playing through *SR3*'s campaign with a friend isn't substantially different from playing it alone: missions proceed in exactly the same way, and for the most part you'll be doing your own thing. But *SR3* is a sandbox, and it's only when you start to treat it as one that the fun of playing with a friend (or online random) is revealed. Nuts to missions: go crazy instead. Concoct elaborate schemes to torture pedestrians, see how many drive-bys you can pull before the cops get you, fling each other into the air with Professor Genki's Super Ballistic Manapult. Cause some chaos, baby!

Oh, and there's also a co-op horde mode, called "Whored Mode". Ha! Get it? Pretty funny. Anyway, don't bother with it. It's not very fun.

DEAD ISLAND

MAX PLAYERS: 4 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

Dead Island is a game where you and three friends can team up to slaughter zombies on a tropical island. Do we really need to elaborate beyond that? Okay, well here's something else: *Dead Island* is a much deeper game than you might assume. Because each of the four playable characters has been designed to fill a specific niche in the co-op ecology, playing with a diverse squad is generally preferable to playing with a bunch of people who all choose the same character. Especially if that "same character" happens to be the police lady from Australia. Good grief what an annoying bint.

Dead Island doesn't have quite the same tactical breadth as something like *Borderlands*, but makes up for it with superior combat. It doesn't matter who you are and where you're from: hacking the undead in the head with a big machete is one of life's great joys, and never gets old. Ever.



RESIDENT EVIL 5

MAX PLAYERS: 2 DROP-IN/DROP-OUT: YES

Ask gamers today what they remember about *Resident Evil 5* and odds are most of them will say that it was racist – or not racist, depending on who you ask. The remainder will be split between co-op and Shiva's arse. Both are great, but we've only got enough space to talk about one, so...

Shiva's arse is shapely and firm... Ha! Just kidding. If we're being honest, co-op in *Resi 5* is pretty much the only thing the game had going for it – luckily it's an excellent thing. At its best, it recalls the films that inspired it: frantic and desperate, bloody and explosive. At its worst, it's formulaic and frustrating. You probably won't enjoy it the whole way through, but those first three or four hours are totally badass and more than worth the price of admission.

FORGOTTEN GEMS

LEGO STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE SAGA

APPROX. PRICE ON EBAY: \$10-20



A compilation combining *LEGO Star Wars* and *LEGO Star Wars: The Original Trilogy*, *The Complete Saga* is the undisputed king of family-friendly co-op. Adults can enjoy it too, but... um... not as much.

SAINTS ROW 2

APPROX. PRICE ON EBAY: \$10-15



A lot like *Saints Row: The Third*, except uglier and buggier and not quite as much fun. Still pretty good, though! Basically this is what you should get if you don't want to shell out for the new one.

PSN

You'd be surprised at how many great co-op games there are on PSN. And not just "great for a cheap downloadable game" either – we're talking legitimately excellent here. And the neat thing about PSN co-op games is that you can buy them on a whim, like say when you come home pissed with a friend and there's nothing on TV. Convenience!



CASTLE CRASHERS

PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$21.95

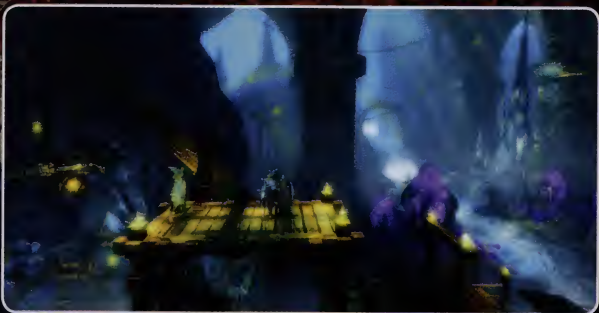
An homage to the great side-scrolling beat-em-ups of the early 90s, *Castle Crashers* is a vibrant and unashamedly silly game that manages to be both instantly accessible and insanely difficult at the same time. With four players, it's undeniably the best example of its genre available on PSN. It isn't an especially deep game, which some purists resent, but a light smattering of RPG mechanics keeps you hooked and allows each player to define their contribution to the team. It has a wicked dope soundtrack as well, so turn up the volume, son!



RENEGADE OPS

PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$19.95

A twin-stick shooter that's part *Geometry Wars* and part *Just Cause*, *Renegade Ops* is a simple game whose appeal is obvious: blowing shit up with tanks is, like, super fun. Co-op with a full complement of four players gets insanely frantic and comes highly recommended, though it's a pity there's no drop-in/drop-out functionality. Local co-op is limited to two-player split-screen, and – like the single-player campaign – is fun enough, but you really want to be playing with as many people as possible at all times. More people = more explosions.



TRINE

PLAYERS: 3 PRICE: \$15.95

Trine – or as it's pronounced here in Australia, "Troin" – is most easily described as a cross between *Diablo* and *The Lost Vikings*, which is to say it's a puzzle-platform game where three characters (a knight, a thief, and a wizard) have to work together using their various abilities to overcome obstacles make their way through a giant dungeon. As you'd expect, this setup lends itself to co-op rather nicely – in fact, *Trine* is probably the most "co-operative" co-op game out there. If you don't work together all the time, you won't get anywhere. Simple as that.



DEAD NATION

PLAYERS: 2 PRICE: \$19.95

Another top-down twin-stick shooter, *Dead Nation* places you in the familiar setting of a zombie apocalypse, gives you a bunch of rad guns, and says "Have fun!" And have fun you shall, especially if you remember to bring a friend. *Dead Nation* in single-player is a little bit on the easy side, but in co-op the difficulty ramps up considerably: zombies become stronger and more numerous, and the already hectic pace picks up tempo. It's actually rather unforgiving in some ways, but then that's the whole point, really.



PAYDAY: THE HEIST

PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$26.95

PAYDAY: The Heist (no we don't know why it's capitalised like that) is a co-operative shooter very much in the vein of Valve's excellent *Left 4 Dead* games. However, instead of four people helping each other survive undead armageddon, it's four people helping each other to rob banks. Gameplay revolves around a few core tasks – incursion, capture, and defence – each of which requires careful teamwork to complete successfully. It's not a deep game, or even an especially well designed one, but it's good fun to jump into for a few hours now and then. (Assuming you can find a game – the online matchmaking is woeful.)

SPLITSCREEN

Splitscreen is very often our preferred way to play co-op. Yes, your view is all cramped and the graphics generally don't look as nice, but those minor annoyances are more than outweighed by the pleasures of real-world human interaction. After all, you can't do a high-five or bro-bones over PSN.

DUNGEON HUNTER: ALLIANCE

MAX PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$19.95

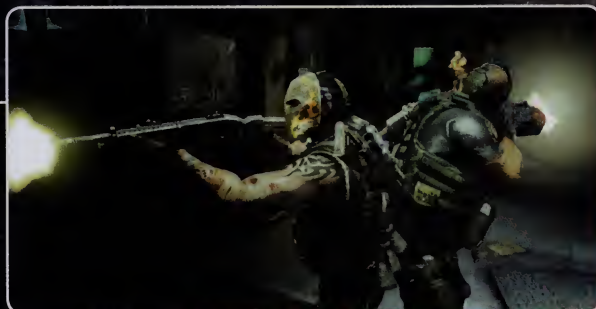
As you probably guessed from the title, *Dungeon Hunter: Alliance* is a traditional dungeon crawler in the *Diablo/Champions of Norrath* sense of the term. Choosing one of three available classes, you and (up to) three others can go romping together through mist-cloaked tunnels, slaughtering monsters, picking up loot and all the rest of it. It's very straightforward stuff, though there are many little touches – such as the round-robin loot system – that elevate *DH:A* above your typical *Diablo* clone, making it an entirely pleasurable (if derivative) experience from beginning to end. Highly recommended.



ARMY OF TWO: THE 40TH DAY

MAX PLAYERS: 2 PRICE: ABOUT \$20-30 ON EBAY

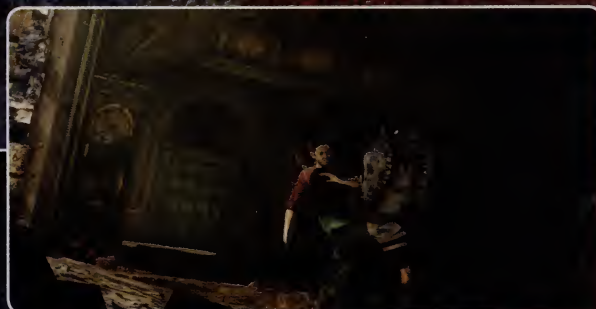
Okay, so it's stupid. It is so, so, sooooo stupid. But listen: you know what else is stupid? Every Arnold Schwarzenegger movie ever made. Does that stop them being radballs? No it does not. *Army of Two: The 40th Day* isn't exactly radballs, but it's enjoyable enough and shares much the same philosophy as many of the Arnie's greats: i.e., turn off your brain and enjoy the explosions, pointdexer. Get yourself a bro, get yourself some brewskies, turn up Dave Matthews Band or whatever awful crap fratboys listen to now, and go shoot some stuff.



UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

MAX PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$109.95

Uncharted 3 comes with two co-op modes: Co-op Adventure mode and Co-op Arena mode. The first is basically a bare bones attempt at recreating the experience of the single-player campaign for two people: there are five levels, each taken from a previous game in the series, and they all revolve around gunplay – mostly (unfortunately) leaving puzzles by the wayside. Co-op Arena replicates traditional multiplayer modes like control, survival, and capture-the-flag. It's not terrible by any means, but really? Not much point.



EARTH DEFENCE FORCE: INSECT ARMAGEDDON

MAX PLAYERS: 4 PRICE: \$49.95

Depending on who you ask, *Insect Armageddon* is either an ingenious tribute to the action games of yesteryear, or it's a dumb game for dummies who just like to shoot bugs because they're dumb. Both sides have their merits, but so far as co-op multiplayer is concerned, it's hard to deny that *Insect Armageddon* is good times – particularly if alcohol is involved (In moderation of course). While it can be repetitive, the constant onslaught of enemies (think *Gauntlet*) keeps your adrenaline pumping more or less non-stop. Good old fashioned fun.



RAGE

PLAYERS: 2 PRICE: \$109.95

There's no denying *RAGE* was a disappointing single-player game, but for its flaws, it still has some great moments. This is true of the co-op mode as well: a nine mission campaign consisting of "flashbacks" to earlier episodes in the *RAGE* universe. On the downside, all of the missions take place indoors, so there's none of the fun open-world exploration you get with games like *Borderlands*. On the plus side, players can work together to rack up combos: a strangely Japanese feature for an id game, but a clever one that does much to redeem what would otherwise be a fairly bland experience.



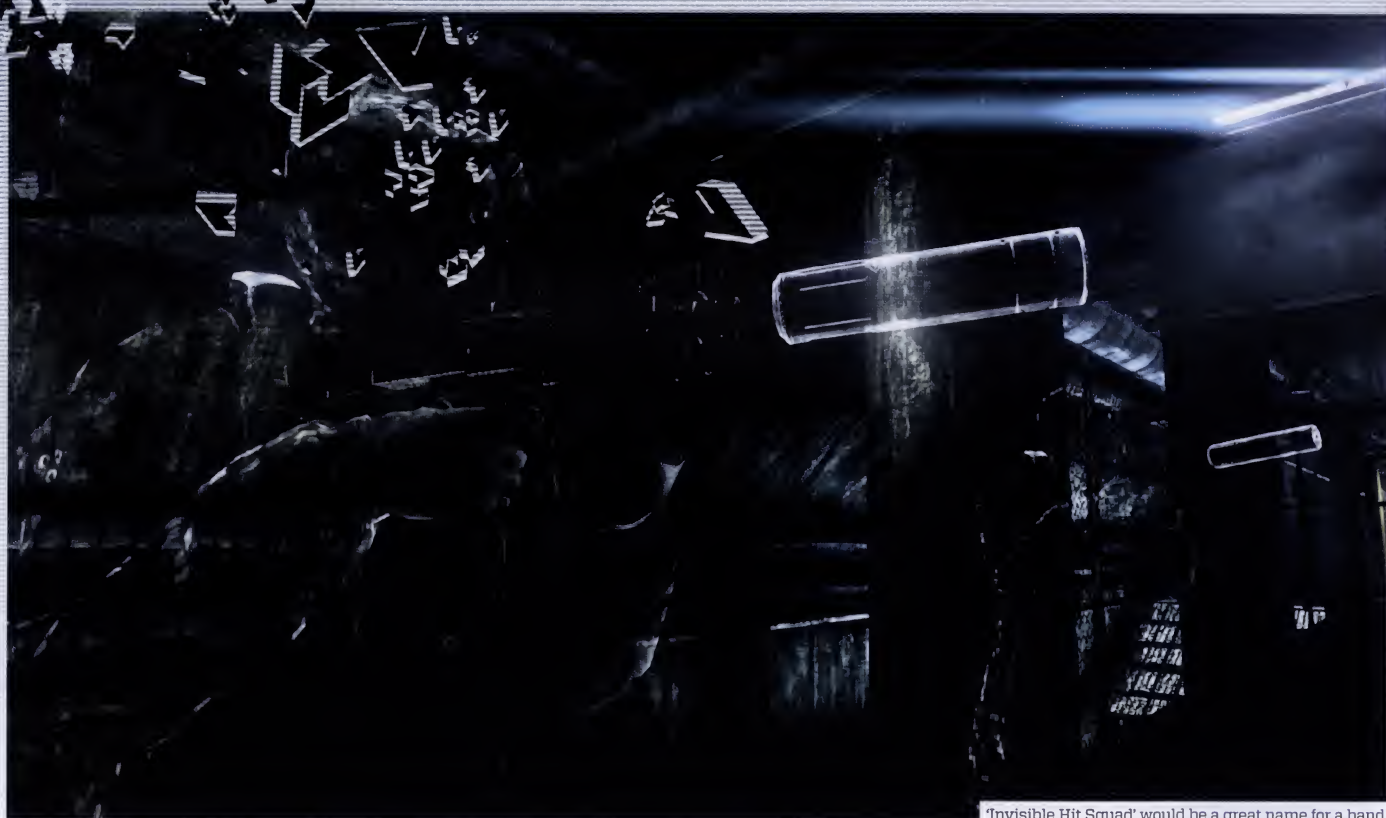


AGENT OF CHANGE

Miles Kilo, the playable character in Syndicate's main campaign, didn't utter a word in our hands-on time with EA and Starbreeze's new shooter. Instead, the tech and gadgets he wields speak for him in a war where technology and people are inherently bound together.

Words: Paul Taylor and Adam Mathew





'Invisible Hit Squad' would be a great name for a band

Not that Kilo was trying to be stealthy – that's an approach best left to *Deus Ex: Human Revolution's* Adam Jensen. Comparisons to *Human Revolution* are inevitable considering both have augmentations as a central gameplay device, but *Syndicate* is an out-and-out shooter. Its focus is on attack but is backed by an 18-year-old heritage, an isometric strategy game with a cool hook where in the future (nearly) everybody has a chip in their head that gives them access to an alternate reality.

How you approach *Syndicate* all depends on your history with it. Hardcore fans and franchise purists were quick to spit chips when they heard it was going to be a shooter, while newcomers had another high-tech shooter clamouring for their attention.

What's important is that it works, and it works incredibly well. While it's impossible to not reference

the PC classic the point is this is a full-bodied shooter that's dripping in style, and the central premise remains in both the single-player side of the game that we got our hands on, and the intriguing co-operative multiplayer. Rather than controlling a group of four agents in the main campaign you step into the boots of one man, Miles Kilo, an agent of EuroCorp. The militarised Dart-6 chip that's implanted in his head gives him access to the world's dataverse that overlays information about his surrounds. Crucially, it also allows him to hack or 'breach'.

From our hands-on time, breaching is a rapid-fire way of gaining access to pretty much anything with moving parts. The enemies you face all have chips in their brain, and there are plenty of doorways and other elements of the levels that need to be breached to be used. There is no laborious mini-game of linking nodes or channeling pipes to risk putting a lull in the action: stab and hold a shoulder button for a couple of seconds while a floating bar fills up, and with a short series of beeps and squeaks the object you're locked onto is hacked. Set your sights on an enemy's brain and, eventually, you'll have up to three breach abilities to use against them.

Chip technology is a big part of the fiction and the *Syndicate* legacy, of how these corporations are controlling the masses through technology. The way the chips work is an integral part of the gameplay, and as you progress you'll need to balance breaching with blasting. It's another layer of gameplay on top of the standard and satisfying shooting, with abilities being used on the fly.

We began our level on a dropship with Kilo's gravelly-voiced partner and mentor, Agent Merritt

◀ Euro bash

You play as Miles Kilo, an elite agent of EuroCorp. Clearly likes Neo's fashion ideas.





Geez, would it kill you to crack a smile, Captain Futuregloom?



"Happiness is a Swedish sunset" - Mark Twain



Coloured lights + lens flare = cyberpunk

(see 'VOXPOPS.exe'), as the two of them are enroute to retrieve a chip from scientist Gary Chang at rival corporation Aspari. Hopping off the dropship and into Aspari's HQ, Merritt blithely explains that this is a simple mission of grabbing the chip, and that "civilian casualties are a non-issue." There are no niceties as Merritt leads the way and point blank shoots two security guards who don't even have a chance to draw their weapons. We separate as Merritt looks for the mainframe and, following instructions, we're off to "find the asshole and get his chip."

Scattered throughout the level are a few business cards that fill in the background of the story, much like books, newspapers and emails did in *Human Revolution*. They have details of the person who own them and while we don't know what their purpose is beyond adding to the exposition they are an entertaining diversion. Our task awaits though, and we're through the door to the 'Customer Relations' office. On the other side of a two-way mirror, an employee of Aspari is tied to a chair and getting the snot pummelled out of him (his chart on the monitor in our room tells us of his insubordination and a tendency to run around drunk whilst wearing no pants).

It's at this point that we're introduced to the first breach ability: suicide. An icon above another guard's head lights up and we're in. Though the consequence of this initial breach is scripted it's no less shocking as the guard starts screaming and picks up a gun, shooting the guy in the chair, then his workmate, and finally himself, shattering the two-way. Our internal voice synthesiser that acts as a status update chimes in, calmly, coldly noticing an "unpredicted behaviour from breach".

In combat, though, each suicide breach is much more dynamic.

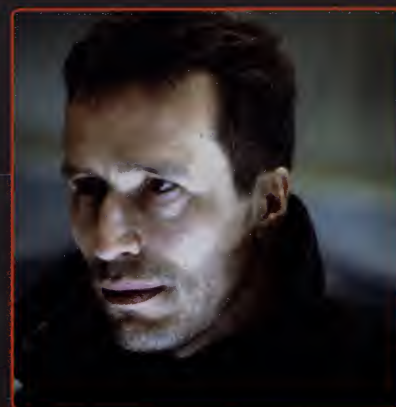
A couple of clinically clean stairwells later and we're faced with about half a dozen guards in a cryostasis room, and they quickly twig we're not one of them. We get rid of a guy at the end of the room as he's running to cover by inflicting suicide on him. His self-detonated grenade blows another guy aside, leaving him open for us to run up and pop him rather than engaging the breach again. Breaches are unlimited, but the only way to recharge them is by rapid kills to flood your body with adrenaline. Every body that goes down pops up with a number indicating how much you're regenerating your adrenaline and they flicker shades of blue: they're dead, physically and digitally.

Get into a spot that's a little too intense and you can switch on your Dart overlay. The screen changes to black and white, and the contours of opposing forces are highlighted with a thin orange outline, showing whether they're exposed or hiding behind cover. Time slows down for a few seconds, giving you chance to take stock and aim for a one-shot kill. Flick it off (or let it run out) and it'll take a little while to recharge on its own accord. It's more than just a bullet-time knock-off though. As you progress throughout the game upgrading your abilities the tactics in using the overlay mode become slightly more complex, as you could increase the rate at which your health regenerates or increase your resistance to damage.

We're at the perimeter of Chang's office, and the internal voice alerts us to him – or rather "soft asset Gary Chang". After a simple spot of platforming and crawling through vents we're face to face. He knows why we're there, and promises that if we try to kill him he'll blow the chip. We're not sure how to respond; we need the chip in one piece but Chang's holding a

(presumably) loaded pistol to his own chin. We begin a slow creep toward him, gun drawn, trained on the arm that's holding the pistol.

It's in vain though. We get too close, and before he pulls the trigger Chang declares "you'll never stop us," the blast throwing him off his feet and leaves the wall behind him a bit more red than it should be. We walk up to his body and Kilo grabs the dead man by his neck, hauling him over to the side of his stained bench and jams a savage-looking needle into his ear. Once inside the needle sprouts vines, and via simple x-ray vision we can see them twisting through his brain, looking for the chip. With a wet plop the chip's out, and we can apply our first and only upgrade for the level. ▶



VOXPOPS.EXE

Miles Kilo, according to Executive Producer Jeff Gamon, is "the" company man; the interests of Eurocorp supersede every consideration. What makes him a hero is difficult to define as much of what you're asked to do is morally ambiguous. I guess like many Starbreeze games, it is possible to be dark and heroic." His partner in digital theft, Agent Merritt, is a complete unknown. While Kilo is a silent protagonist, we think Merritt sounds a lot like Michael Wincott (pictured), who was most famous in *The Crow* and *Alien Resurrection*. Soundalike or sounds about right? EA aren't saying. "I always hate answering a question with a point blank 'I can't talk about it' and I'd like to give you something," says Ben O'Donnell, Producer at EA, "but one of the specific things I can't talk about is the talent. I do apologise, it's really bad, but that's going to be a little treat for everyone later on. There's some really great talent in it, and we don't want to blow our wad and tell everyone who it is!" Nuts.



Recent graduates from the Henchman Academy being put through their paces



LOCAL AREA NETWORK

Ben O'Donnell, Producer at EA, talks Starbreeze, co-op multiplayer, and why Russians are more hardcore than you'd think.



Regular shoulder rubs are syndicate SOP



"It's a UNIX system! I know this!"

OPS: How did this project come about? Did Starbreeze approach EA, or was it the other way around?

Ben O'Donnell: EA own the *Syndicate* IP and it's an idea that's been sitting for a few years now. We approached Starbreeze with it, and they seemed like the right fit because they had this legacy of doing quite dark, dystopian games which also push a really cool story through it.

OPS: What qualities are inherent in Starbreeze's games?

BO: For us, it was a great first-person pedigree. They've been refining their tech for years and I think with Starbreeze it's one of those engines that you've just got to get in your hands and feel how it plays. Mainly, really, they can drive a story through a first-person game and build characters and set a scene that involves dark, dystopian, troubled people (laughs) and imagine a world that's negative but you don't mind being in. We got Richard Morgan, a sci-fi writer, on board, and they've very willing to work co-operatively with whoever their partners are. (see MORGAN.exe)

OPS: Tell us about the co-op multiplayer side of the game.

BO: The co-op mode is very much our way of tipping our hat to the legacy and we were very conscious of the fact that a lot of people remember the original game quite fondly, and we wanted to do right by them. [So we've] weaved in the legacy of the original game which was a four-person, squad-based game. Four-player co-op seemed like a no-brainer. We always knew it was going to be a big element of the game, but it's been taken in equal measure. It's nine maps – three groups or 'acts', if you like, of three – of a completely separate story that's set in the same world and around the same time. It's not like you're playing the single player maps through with four guys, it's completely bespoke, with a main story arc going across it, and they are four completely different characters.

When I talk about 'tipping our hat to the legacy', some of the maps are actual 3D representations of the original *Syndicate* maps. People who remember *Mozambique* and *Atlantic Accelerator* will see that we've taken that top-down layout and created a 3D world. There's no competitive multi. People play *Battlefield* and *CoD*, so [those games have] cornered the market. Our idea was that if it's not going to do



cutting edge then why do it as a 'me too', so we just wanted to concentrate on co-op and do it well. There's going to be a big focus on upgrade ability, and there's lots of elements of MMOs in there. As you play through you get loot drops from the bigger enemies, so you can use that to upgrade your weapons or if they drop blueprints you can use them to research technology and upgrade yourself. You can rip chips out of people to upgrade yourself, too.

OPS: Is co-op going to be purely story-based, or do you have other modes that riff on that?

BO: We keep it as a story. You can create your own syndicates, and I guess they'd be the equivalent of clans anywhere else, [each with] up to 20 players, and four [playing] at anytime. You don't even have to have four players as you can play through with one, two or three people, though one would be a bit

a bit tough. There's going to be a big emphasis on syndicates, and tracking stats, and leaderboards. You can set up contracts for other syndicates to try and beat your score [for] bragging-rights. We've kept the co-op as a very pure experience and then built a meta-game around it that's a bit deeper.

OPS: So, do you pick a character and they have certain skills, or can you equip them with whatever skill you want when you start each match?

BO: A big element is keeping it consistent with the chip gameplay, but the other big element is healing and resurrecting. We found that by default people take on classes. Some players hang back and heal, and others just tank in, so in the front end you can choose a class and your load out corresponds to that.

In single player you have the three breach abilities, whereas you have up to 25 different ones in co-op, things like Virus, which is like a poison in *Warcraft*, to cut through shields for example. Then there's damage buffs, and heal buffs. You can upgrade all of those things incrementally with stuff you pick and general upgrades as you go. It's very much a way of choosing a character and having it correspond to your play style.

OPS: Could you employ bots to fill in the other spots if you're a person or two down?

BO: No, we've kept it [purely with human players]. I think the idea was that players have a tendency to get pissed off if the AI isn't doing what it should be doing [so] there's more scope for frustration there than anything else. The game balances itself according to how many players are in.

OPS: You said that you were keeping true to the original game, and although it's nearly 20 years old a lot of people are pretty possessive over it. How do you deal with the backlash, and how do you convince newcomers that this is something for them?

BO: I think persuading people who haven't played the original game isn't really an issue. If people don't know anything about it then it's a cool fiction and narrative. I don't think that was going to be a hard sell. I think the thing that surprised me the most was that a lot of young guys who were probably born in 1993 or maybe not old enough to play the games were saying 'oh I'm such an avid *Syndicate* fan'. I did a trade show in Russia, and apparently every single



person in Russia has played *Syndicate*; all of the press were hardcore fans.

So, we're aware of it, and when it was announced people were getting quite vocal, and then we released the announcement trailer. We'd get a guy on the forums saying 'Oh my god, *Syndicate*, please don't ruin it,' or whatever, and then you'd see the very next post saying 'what are you talking about, this looks amazing,' and then the first guy saying 'yeah, you're right actually, I'm sure it'll be great.' So we just let [the fans] figure it out for themselves, and we sat back and said 'cool.' When people hear the motivation behind [making this a shooter rather than a top-down game] and understand times have changed. Games from 1993 aren't necessarily what people want to be playing now. If we were to do a revision of the original game I think they'd be... (Laughs) I don't know how it would go down.

OPS: Still, would you ever consider putting forward an HD remake of the original. You've probably been asked this so many times.

BEN: (Laughs) We've talked about it, and it's not something that we have planned. I think stuff like [original] *Syndicate* is of a time, isn't it? I think some of the charm of those old games is the way they use the early tech. I don't know how the gameplay would hold up if you were to do a hi-res version. How would it play? I don't think it would work.



HACKING-THE-DEMO.EXE

Our hands on time with *Syndicate* was short. While the other journalists struggled to finish we got into the spirit of the game's hacking manifesto by poking around the menus. Sure enough we bypassed security and brute forced our way into seeing things that we shouldn't have been privy to. Specifically, some of the powers or "chips" that will be available later in the game. Here's the (work in progress) data we dug up...

TOUGHENED

Improves Dart's pain suppression subsystems, reducing the agent's reaction to incoming damage.
(Reduce damage by 20%)

REGENERATIVE OVERLAY

Diverts an amount of IPA consumption to your medical control systems, allowing the medical nanomachines to operate while in Dart mode even if you are taking damage (Regenerate 7% of your total health per second while in Dart mode)

EMERGENCY RESUSCITATION

Enables an emergency medical subsystem that stops you from dying for a short period of time after sustaining damage that would otherwise be fatal.
(Brief invulnerability when close to death)

PERFORATOR

Shapes the Backfire breach explosion to generate a directional blast effect that shreds the weapon's operator with a hail of shrapnel.
(Increases backfire damage by 100%
Increases vulnerability duration by 100%)

AUGMENTED OVERLAY

Dart establishes a series of dedicated control subsystems to significantly improve implant performance and system reaction time when in Dart overlay mode.
(25% damage bonus while in Dart overlay mode
Damage taken reduced by 20% while in Dart overlay mode)

REGENERATION BOOST

Improvements in the software subroutines of the medical nanomachines regulating your systems increases the speed and effectiveness of health regeneration.
(Regeneration activates 25% faster,
Regenerate health at a 33% increased rate)

KILLING SPREE

Surplus energy generated from rampage kills is fed to the arm and eye implant controllers, allowing them to operate at significantly higher capacity. During a killstreak damage is increased by 25% for each rampage kill.
(Doubles the amount of time before the rampage timer resets
Increases damage by 25% for each kill during a rampage)

DEXTEROUS

Diverts Dart resources to arm, eye and brain implant control during weapon swapping and reloading, increasing hand-eye coordination.
(Lowers the time it takes to reload or switch weapons)

CERBERUS BACKFIRE

Integrates Cerberus Targeting Software into the backfire breach application, upgrading the multi-nodal transmission system.
(Backfire will now affect a third target)

DAMPEN BLAST

Hardens your body to better withstand shrapnel and shockwave impacts, causing enemy explosive effects to be dampened. Your own explosive attacks no longer deal damage to you.
(You take 33% less damage from explosive attacks
Immune to damage from your own explosive attacks)

FEAST OF SHRAPNEL

Analysing various spatial packing algorithms used by the leading interior design software packages allows Dart to better organise magazine and grenade storage. You may now carry twice the ammo and grenades.
(Doubles the amount of ammunition and grenades that can be carried.)

PROTECTIVE SHIELDING

Grants electromagnetic barrier against projectile attacks that stops damage while active. This shielding regenerates over time if you are at full health.
(Enables protective shielding)

SYNCHRONISE

Dart 6 better synchronises the Dart Overlay Interfaces with your nervous system, decreasing the synaptic fatigue caused by the greatly increased neuron signalling that occurs while utilising the overlay.
(Maximum duration of Dart Overlay time increased by 25%)

ADRENALINE PUSH

Implements new efficiency procedures in the agent's emotional regulator, improving the adrenaline conversion process.
(Increases your energy gain from kills by 25%)

STABILITY

Upgrades arm implants drivers with predictive recoil dampening, reducing scatter and recoil. Applies a distortion compensator to your visual filter, reducing perceived impact effect when taking damage.
(Scatter reduced by 55%,
Recoil reduced by 50%)

EXECUTIONER

Hooks your medical control systems into the Emotional Dampening System. The surge of adrenaline produced when you perform a melee execution generates enough energy to send the medical subsystems into overdrive.
(Performing a melee execution heals you 50% of your maximum health)

SAFEGUARD

A combination of improvements to the trauma prioritisation software and application of a low-powered field generator to protect the agent's vital organs.
Prevents most critical injuries.
(Base health increased by 33%)

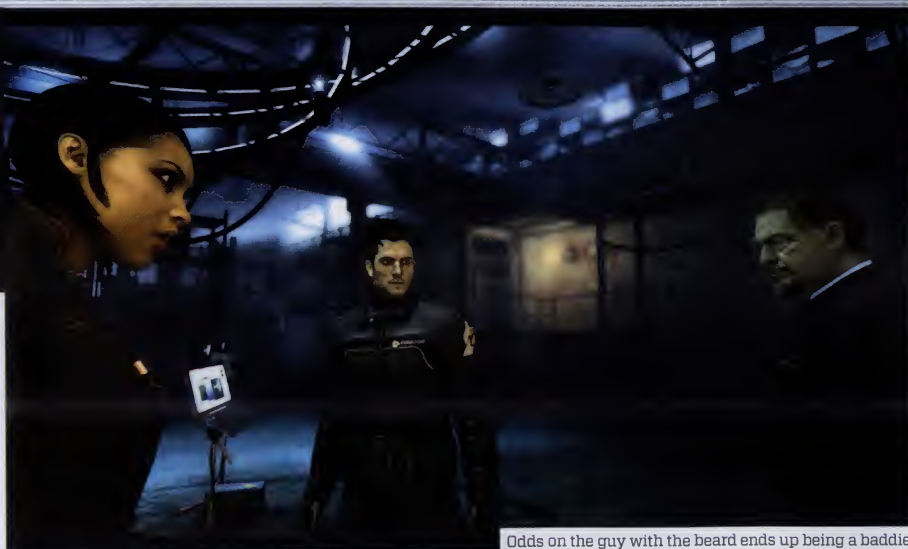


These passively-activated abilities are a combination of defensive and offensive skills and from looking at the list (see 'Hacking_the_demo.exe') this list of perks offers some intense combinations. The system is pretty simple, and it accentuates the shooting aspect of *Syndicate*.

Two more breaches, backfire and persuade, have also been added to our selection in our HUD, selectable by flicking on the d-pad. Backfire causes a guard's gun or grenade to, well, backfire, either killing him or at least leaving him vulnerable. Persuade an enemy and he'll join you for a short amount of time before the breach causes him to suicide.

The ruse is up. Aspari knows we're there and as we make our egress to the waiting dropship, heavily-armoured troops are filtering through the cryostasis chambers. Worryingly, a powerful turret has popped out of the ceiling and has its laser beam tracking us. We pop out for a second, get line of sight and breach it, and it turns on the guys carrying shields. The effect is insanely, will-this-get-past-the-Classification-Board brutal as the turret literally rips through the advancing troops and retracts after a few seconds. As we come up and see who's left we notice that enemy AI reacted well if we were attacking, though some oddly strafed back and forth if we stood inert. At other times the beefier, armoured security personnel leapt over cover to either flank us or make a retreat.

With the alarm pulsing we push through and stumble on a firing test range. The lab coat in there is oblivious to the mayhem only a room away, and he willingly relinquishes his Gauss gun. Our new toy locks



onto objects and can shoot around corners, much like the Bullseye in *Resistance*. We test it out in the next room on the guys who duck into cover, juggling breaches while activating the Dart overlay, picking off guys that are clumped on the balcony with backfire hoping to take out couple of their mates.

Gunplay is tight and satisfying throughout. Though there's plenty of ammo, headshots count as there's usually plenty of bad guys to take down. You need to keep adrenaline pumping so that breaches are always on the boil; we used up all three in rapid succession and were left struggling.

Once outside our dropship's being attacked, and is holding its own. Shielded drones swarm in and need to be breached to drop their protective layer, while more heavily armoured guards are switching between firing at the ship and going for us. We clear them out, defusing grenades that are lobbed our way and then hurriedly rush down the gangway towards the dropship.

Then there's an explosion. The ship lazily spins out of control and begins to turn on its nose. Kilo throws his hands in front of his face and the demo ends.

Throughout this we're continuously impressed with the way Kilo navigates the level, sliding to cover, climbing ladders, and Starbreeze have done a genuinely great job of making us feel like we're actually there. Melee kills involve fists and feet and have to be done up close, and although they take longer than a simple swing of a rifle butt they're an astonishingly effectively display of Kilo's physicality. Seeing Kilo's hand struggle and reef open a vent cover by sheer brute force is a refreshing change from using your Dart 6 chip as a one-size-fits-all solution.

Starbreeze did a fine job realising the embodiment of Riddick in *The Chronicles of Riddick* titles, and the evolution of the way the playable character moves is noticeable. There's a fine sense of weight and

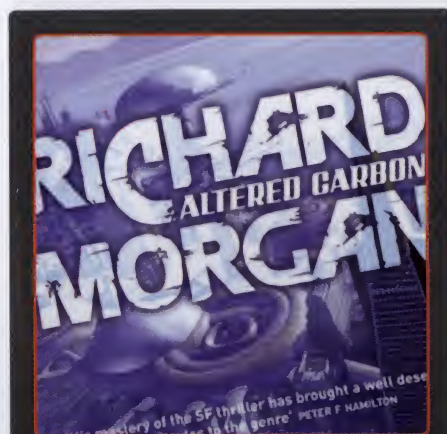
TOOLS-OF-THE-TRADE. EXE

We also hacked into a subroutine that gave us a glimpse at the sort of weapons you'll wield in the finished game.

- Tesla gun
- Thermite Gun
- Rocket Launcher
- Minigun
- Persuadatron
- Gauss gun
- Laserrifle
- EMP Grenades

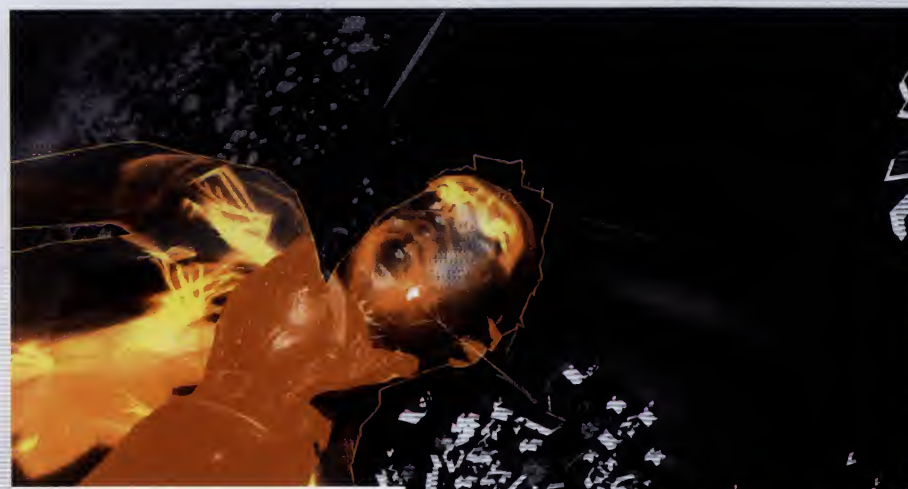
momentum in the way we run around a stage (despite a gun constantly pointing out in front of us). Kilo moves at a decent pace, but sprint and the gun cocks on a more rakish angle, the screen giving way to subtle but effective blurring at the edges. Whilst it's subdued, the minimal HUD bounces and strains as you turn corners or pelt down a corridor, and we really love how your weapon's status floats above whatever you're holding.

EA have absolute confidence that Starbreeze are going to make a great game. The fact that it's taken a radically different form to its namesake is a non-issue here. They're not asking you to forget all about the 1993 original, but they do want to have fun with it as they twine together gameplay and story. From what we've played it looks like it's going to be the first big hit of 2012. We can't wait. 📀



MORGAN.EXE

Sci-fi writer Richard Morgan is a writer on *Syndicate*, and has a number of books to his name, including the acclaimed *Altered Carbon*. In a nutshell, it's a detective novel set in the near future, in a time when your soul and mind could be transferred into a new body called a 'sleeve'. You keep your memories but get a shiny new casing to play around in. This isn't the first videogame Morgan's worked on, as he was a writer on EA's *Crysis 2*. For *Syndicate*, though, EA brought him into their early creative meetings, laid down the ideas they had about chips, hacking and the *Syndicate* lore, and he developed the world and the plot from there.



Miles throws caution to the wind and goes for choke

Unexplored reaches of weirdness are to me what Platinum trophies are to you. I set off into the wilds of Home without a guide, nor a compass, nor even a Sherpa.

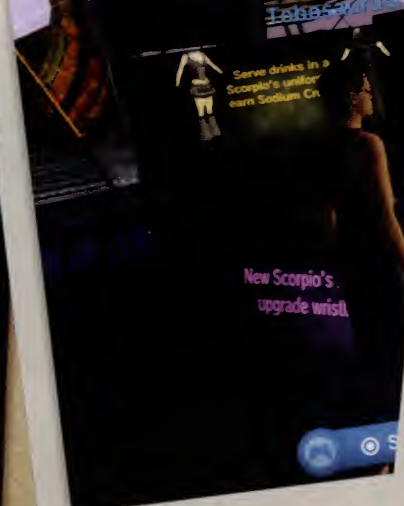
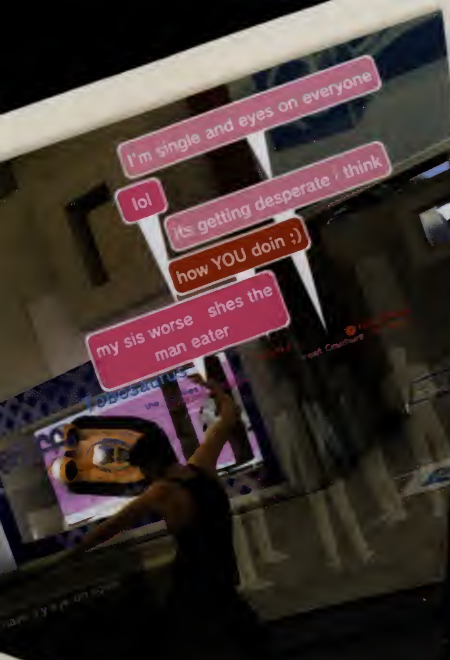
Sir Hump-a-lot

Pulling the Running Man behind someone kind of looks like you're humping them. This is the logical next step for me. Things come to a head when I Running Hump an attractive Asian girl and her possible boyfriend does the Shake Fist thing at me several times.



Suit up!

The fairer sex don't want a bar of Generic New User Tobosaurus, so it's time for things to get real – Don Draper real. "Suit up!" Barney Stinson yells from my subconscious mind, and I listen. I re-enter Home Square a groomed man in the finest of attire with bonus two-tone shoes. No-one cares.



It's dark out here,
but not dangerous.
There's a conga
line of people doing
the Running Man
by some bubble
machines, clearly
high on goofballs.

Gnome Tobsky

If there's one thing everyone's much worse at than me, it's Gnome Curling. It's about as fun as inhaling flatulence, but it's the only half-decent thing going at Indie Park and upsetting people is cool too. Many an Italian is deprived of the Gnome Hat prize that day, and I don't even know what I'm doing.

This isn't like Cypress Creek, though. There's no Hank Scorpio pointing me towards the unusually convenient Fashion District or anything. So I look for places to go. The Action District. That sounds like exactly what Tobosaurus is all about. To the Action District!

It's dark out here, but not dangerous. There's a conga line of people doing the Running Man by some bubble machines, clearly high on goofballs. I join their partisan boogie until I catch sight of a glaring red neon sign that says, "Play Bootleggers '29." I love illicitly filming movies for illegal sale and 29 is an alright number. I head on in. Turns out it's just some crappy mob-themed FPS multiplayer thing, but there are also some snappy associated pinstripe threads I can spend \$10+ real dollars dressing myself in if I want.

Okay so I meant well, but eventually I emerge from the Action District dressed as the giant pink bunny from *Silent Hill*. "Why are you wearing that stupid human suit?" I ask a Generic New Home User on my way out, quite pleased with myself. "ggffhshhj," he says.

I visit the Malls (there are two of them, East and West) and am immediately confronted by storefronts offering reams upon reams of more useless crap. What I'm not confronted by are any people. The only soul here is a put-out giant pink *Silent Hill* bunny, and he's not interested in forking up \$8.45 for a new

London pub-style Apartment with – oh my God! Really? – working beer taps. I want to punch someone in the face but, again, there's nobody here and also no "Punch Self in Face" gesture option.

You know what this is? It's the social media equivalent to Sexpo, copying its bizarre target-all marketing but trading its designer Swedish marital aids for crappy branded avatar tees. Someone tells you, "Dude, think of the potential!" So you think of it and you're all, "Holy pulsating jubbles, idiot friend, you're right. This sounds rad." The reality of the piece, however, is that it's just a wonderland of slightly misguided commercialisation and limited interaction. The former is best exemplified by the current Pot Noodle promotion sweeping *Home*'s nation. My first few steps into Home Square were instantly rewarded with a Pot Noodle suit that, if worn, turned Tobosaurus into a comically large cup of Pot Noodles with dinky white legs and the tightest little ass. Posters for this latest insta-luncheon craze are everywhere. You can even gaze in ribald fascination at the TV advertisements spruiking its deliciousness around the clock.

We don't even get Pot Noodles here in Australia.

But that's easy enough to deal with. We're assaulted by ads for all kinds of irrelevance on a daily basis anyway. What's harder to ignore is the fact that, as a social network, *Home* still has a long way to go.

Bunny love
I can't believe it. Even suiting up didn't do it for *Home*'s alleged females. At this point I lose control, and in doing so, unwittingly refer to the Pick Up Artist's handbook. Chicks swarm my pink bunny ass. "Freemium," shyeah right. This stuff might not be pay-to-win, but it's totally pay-to-hook-in.



Bowling in the Spanish Quarter

For whatever reason, the Bowling Alley is pretty much *Home*'s own Spanish Quarter. "Te importaría salir," one of them says to me after a while, and I'm all, "Me gusta bro" and throw him the Guns pose. Later I Google this phrase and find out it means, "Would you mind leaving?" Pendejos!

The biggest issue revolves around really needing a keyboard to make this work – a non-essential item for the average PS3 owner if ever there was one. Tapping messages with the d-pad and buttons sucks, and the little QWERTY accessory that snaps onto the front of your controller costs Earth money. Hence you're eventually reduced to internet shorthand and/or *Home*'s pre-shrunk choice of words and phrases ("Hello," "Yes," "I have no keyboard," etc.), meaning that communicating with anyone on levels either genuine or irreverent is rare. Not only is making new friends difficult, you can't even troll anyone properly. Yeah, don't even try dashing into the middle of a conversation and killing them all with a quick Salsa move. It's so passé no-one reacts to it anymore. Trust me: I know.

One thing that has seen incremental improvement since *Home*'s launch are the mini-games on offer – but don't frisbee away your full-priced games just yet, folks. Tobosaurus stumbled into many different arcades and, after waiting in a virtual line to play said games – which is a rant for another time – I took my place on the highscore tables. The three most popular queues led me to *Uncharted 3: Fortune Hunter* (think: a quick-time third-person shooter hastily crossbred with a Choose Your Own Adventure book), *Project Velocity* (a *Wipeout* clone that I now want wiped off my HDD) and *Salt*

Shooter (a halfway decent *Battlezone* port). The upside: being only passably good at these 'games' earns Tobosaurus some virtual crap for his virtual house.

As well as being perpetually empty, this Apartment is the best example of why spending money in *Home* is ill-advised. You can spend tons of cash pimping out *Home*'s default harbourside studio apartment (harbourside because there are boats and palms right outside your window), but for what? Your dwelling is isolated from everyone in what looks like cocaine Miami. Where's Don Johnson? You're completely alone in there. If you had neighbours, sure. That'd be worth having them look in and see your badass CD rack.

Which is really what any extended stay in *Home* ends up being – one big "That'd be awesome if..." More than any other department, this applies to *Home*'s so-called new "game platform" initiative. There's no way you'd spend more time than you absolutely had on any of these amateur minutes. You already have a PS3, all ready to play *Skyrim* and everything. As if to acknowledge its own redundancy, a trip to the *Tekken 6* "Mishima Zaibatsu Recreation Floor" reveals several *Tekken 6* cabinets. "Play me," they say. So you do. Or you try to. "Please insert the *Tekken 6* disc in the PlayStation 3 system," they reply.

"lol wtf," observes Tobosaurus. 🎮



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competitions & prizes • discussions • news & updates • feedback

in review



► **GAME OF THE MONTH**

Tekken Hybrid

Tag. You're it.

Review ratings

10 Incredible: Perfection is relative and elusive, and no game will ever be *perfect*. Our 10 doesn't mean a game is flawless, it means a game has done everything it set out to do in an incredible fashion and thus it deserves our highest possible kudos.

9 Excellent: An outstanding game, either limited by its scope, sequel status (and lack of improvement) or a few too many minor blemishes from being a 10. Likely one of the best in its genre, a 9 comes with very high praise.

8 Great: Still well ahead of the pack in most departments despite a few issues here and there. Thoroughly recommended.

7 Good: A robust package that does a solid job despite a handful of mild to moderate problems. Enjoyable in parts, just not fantastic overall.

6 Decent: This game will have some noticeable flaws that may make it hard to recommend to those who aren't fans of the genre, but it will do more right than it does wrong. Just.

5 Mediocre: A conceded pass, if you know what we mean. Half okay, but half-busted. Might scrape by for fans, but with the quality games we do have, there's no need to drop real money on a game that half sucks.

4 Poor: Anything below 5, strictly speaking, is a fail – but there are degrees of 'bad' just as there are degrees of 'good'. A 4 is unrefined, partially broken and poorly designed.

3 Very disappointing: Things start to go very wrong here – fundamentally flawed in many ways, boring and close to pointless.

2 Terrible: Nothing good here, and definitely not worth removing the wrapper.

1 The worst: Reserved for the very worst gaming could ever offer. A broken, offensive mess without a single redeeming quality. If a 10 is better than virtually every game available, a 1 is worse than virtually every game available. OPS has handed out this score only once.

This Month

- 70** Tekken Hybrid
- 72** Metal Gear Solid HD Collection
- 74** Catherine
- 75** Hydrophobia: Prophecy
- 76** King of Fighters XIII
- 77** Jurassic Park: The Game
- 78** NCIS: The Game
- 80** Medieval Moves
- 80** Start Party: Save the World
- 81** PUMA: After Hours Athletes
- 81** Move Fitness



▲ We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Sony Bravia for the best picture possible. We choose to play our games using the Turtle Beach PX5 headsets for awesome surround sound. www.turtlebeachheadsets.com.au

Play this if you like

Tekken 3

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: FIGHTING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: SCE
DEVELOPER: NAMCO
BANDAI PARTNERS
PLAYERS: 1-2
RRP: \$59.95

Ever play as Nina in *Death By Degrees*? Don't. The game title was apt



"Fear my Asian Elvis with arthritis technique"



Put a ping-pong ball in the hole and win a prize!



And then the robot got stuck in an amazeballs loop

Tekken Hybrid

An iron-clad mish-mash

Namco's brawler was, for a long time, the pinnacle of its genre on the PS3, and was as synonymous with PlayStation as *Crash Bandicoot*, *Gran Turismo* and *Ridge Racer*. The first game in the series was close enough to be a launch title on the first PlayStation, and *Tag Tournament* was a highlight of PS2's launch line-up. It's the latter that's been given the suddenly ubiquitous update treatment in *Tekken Hybrid*.

That's an apt name, too. *Hybrid* is a compilation of the 2000 title, a snapshot of the sequel *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* that's currently in arcades, as well as the CG movie *Tekken Blood Vengeance 3D*. Pop the disc in to your console and you have to install both *Tag HD* and *Tekken Tag 2 Prologue* to the HDD, while *Blood Vengeance* appears as a standard Blu-ray in the video icon of the XMB. Despite installing the games you will need the disc to boot them, and both games need over a gig of space.

Tag Tournament is the star of this package both by its own virtue and because the other parts are, well, a bit crap. More on that later. For a game that's just over 11 years old – and a launch title at that – *Tag Tournament* should draw appreciative nods and pursed lips in between murmurs of 'not bad'. It's the same thing you do when you watch the first episode of *The Biggest Loser* then tune in again at the season finale.

Visually, this HD update looks really

good, all things considered. Character models are crisp and vibrant despite their oddly-animated faces, and we still like how they flex and open their fists and palms when attacking. One thing you'll immediately notice though is that backgrounds and arenas aren't properly joined, so you'll often see the virtual edge of the grass or dojo or school yard sheering off and rotating at odd angles.

Although the now laughable pre-rendered cut-scenes remain murky and trapped at 4:3 the in-game engine feels natural in widescreen, giving the fighters plenty of room to thrash around, and the extra real estate hasn't negatively affected the tag mechanic. To get technical for a

moment, it's logical to assume that the extra bit of space at either side of the screen would make tagging in and out a touch slower. We haven't really felt a difference and slipped back into things relatively quickly. Either the characters cover the extra ground a touch quicker than they used to or your teammate steps onscreen half a second sooner. Whatever. It works.

All the modes remain pretty much intact and nothing new's been added, so any dreams of going online should be shelved. Arcade has all of the 30-odd characters unlocked from the start, as well as all their costumes and their endings within the options. For some it means the challenge has been sucked out of it, but



Pair Play Mode

Got three mates and three spare DualShocks? You can all play together, each taking a fighter. You'll have to wait until your mate tags you in, and it's worth finding partnerships that have special tag moves. For example, Paul and Law, Nina and Anna, and Ling and Panda can partner up. It'll take a lot of practice (or about 10 seconds on Google) to discover all the combos.



Namco and realism? Are you tekken the piss?

Wrong! The Devil wears Armani

“*Tag Tournament* succeeds as a HD update and **cheerfully robust brawler**”



Use your freaking sword already



The gang war got real when The Bloods recruited bears



Buy a badge and you can be an inspector of anything

like most fighting games you're missing the point if you're purposefully going at it solo. Some hidden costumes can be found by hitting and there's a decent selection tucked away by experimenting with the face buttons. All of the characters bar Dr. Boskonovitch (old useless guy) and Gon (stupid small dinosaur) from *Tekken 3* are here, and a few choice ones from *Tekken 2* also return for thankfully plotless biff. Whilst the amount of characters sounds impressive a lot of these are derivatives or combinations of others (we're looking at you Jack 2 and Gun Jack, King and Armor King, Anna and Nina).

Soloists could always spend their time perfecting the rather silly mini-game *Tekken Bowl*, where you grab two characters and take them to the alley as you aim to knock down reality-defying Heihachi Mishima-shaped pins. Each character has their own attributes that you'll have to discover by experimentation, but we're fans of Jack-2's Terminator-vision for pin-point accuracy.

Tekken Bowl aside, this was *Tekken* before Namco started adversely fiddling with the formula, where poster-boy Jin

was a composite of Jun and Kazuya with a few of his own special moves mixed in, and you can truthfully say that at the time it felt more like *Tekken 3.5* rather than a full-blown sequel. This was the first game where certain blocked moves lead to your character stumbling and the tag combos needed a lot of practice to get right. Jabbing and initiates a universal tag throw, though, so there's an easy out for flagging combatants.

All this is a prelude to *Prologue*, a supremely skinny tease of what's to come in 2012. You get four characters – Xiaoyu, Alisa Bosconovitch, Devil Kazuya and Devil Jin – to play in an endless loop of matches that riff on the six possible combinations. It's undeniable the mechanics have evolved as it takes a healthy dose of *Tekken 6* with the Bound floor-bounce manoeuvre, as well as employing the brutal Tag Assault system where you can seamlessly employ both your fighters in a devastating combo. Everything clips along at an expected arcade-rate and looking very pretty, too.

What gets in the way is the character design. Although these four are pivotal

characters in *Blood Vengeance* we're a little bemused that they've been picked as great examples of what's to come in *Prologue*, as the devil variants of Jin and Kazuya are big, brown obtrusive hulks. It would've made more sense to introduce new elements with more familiar and manageable characters.

Which leaves *Blood Vengeance*, a fully CG-animated flick with so much ham and cheese wrapped around some pretty cool fight scenes that this is a dish for only the hardcore *Tekken* fans. Honestly, its on-paper inclusion is nice but unless you're absolutely nuts for *Tekken*'s plot (ha!) you'll spend your time in the actual games.

With *Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3* out, as well as *King of Fighters XIII*, *SoulCalibur V* and the *Tekken/Streeties* crossovers inbound, it's never been a richer time for fight fans. While a bit old fashioned, *Tag Tournament* succeeds as an HD update and a cheerfully robust brawler. You should also add a point for every \$10 you can knock off that standard RRP. **Paul Taylor**

Final Say

PRESENTATION For a game that's 11 years old it's scrubbed up remarkably well, and the widescreen format feels natural. *Prologue* looks like the deluxe nuts.

SOUND Best turned way up to hear all the bone-splintering effects.

CONTROLS Spot on, though you'll realise how much quicker newer *Tekken* is compared to *Tournament*. *Prologue* feels like liquid.

REPLAY VALUE Trophy support should keep you engaged for a good while.

Verdict

What's old is new again. Don't be put off by that score as there's still a lot of fun to be had in *Hybrid*, but as a package it's a little weak.

7



At the movies

To save your broadband, here's a blurb ripped straight from the press release to give you the basic plot of *Blood Vengeance*: Set in the rich *Tekken* universe, *Tekken Blood Vengeance 3D* follows Xiaoyu Ling, seasoned martial artist and high school student, tasked by the G Corporation to infiltrate an international school in Kyoto to gather information on the mysterious student Shin Kamiya. Before she can make any progress in the investigation, Shin is kidnapped by an unknown assailant. Digging deeper into Shin's background in an attempt to rescue him, Xiaoyu learns about the frightening underbelly of the Mishima Zaibatsu. Jin Kazama, Kazuya Mishima and the late Heihachi Mishima's conspiracy that's stained with blood.

A screen from Kojima's spin-off racer:
Road Rash: Big Snake Overtake

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

Metal Gear?!

Play this if you like

Tactical Espionage
Action, cutscenes

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

ADVENTURE

RELEASE: TBC

DISTRIBUTOR:

KONAMI

DEVELOPER: KONAMI

PLAYERS: 1-4

RRP: \$79.95

It'd be criminally easy for a new gamer to patrol a game store aisle, glance at *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection* and mutter, "hmpf, just a box." This, of course, would be a stupid and fatal mistake. Hardcore fans who actually experienced these tactical espionage epics will take one look at this package and illicit the correct response: the manifestation of a large exclamation point. Possibly above their head, more likely in their pants.

Complete transparency for the get-go; this superlative collection is worth codicing home about. For the price of one game you get to walk away with *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Metal Gear Solid 3* and *Metal Gear Solid Peacewalker*, not to mention the MSX classics that started the franchise, *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. Truly, not since Valve's *Orange Box* have

we seen this much quality pressed onto one disc and this dirt cheap.

We have no compunction in telling you we're hardcore fans of the franchise, but in retrospect we can spot some idiosyncrasies in this series that newcomers ought to be forewarned about. For starters, game designer Hideo Kojima was (and indeed still is) fond of lengthy cutscenes and expository dialogues via two-way radio devices. That's fine if you grew up in the PSone era where such non-interactive storytelling devices were mind-blowing, but we imagine it'll rankle some modern gamer feathers.

It's just a minor concern though, and one that is assuaged by the fact that the plot and characters are enthralling (often by great scripting, sometimes because of wackiness) and you can skip to the action any time you like. Not that we'd ever recommend it.

We're happy to say that the first title on offer isn't just *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*, rather it's the feature-bloated variation thereof, *Substance*. Fans will

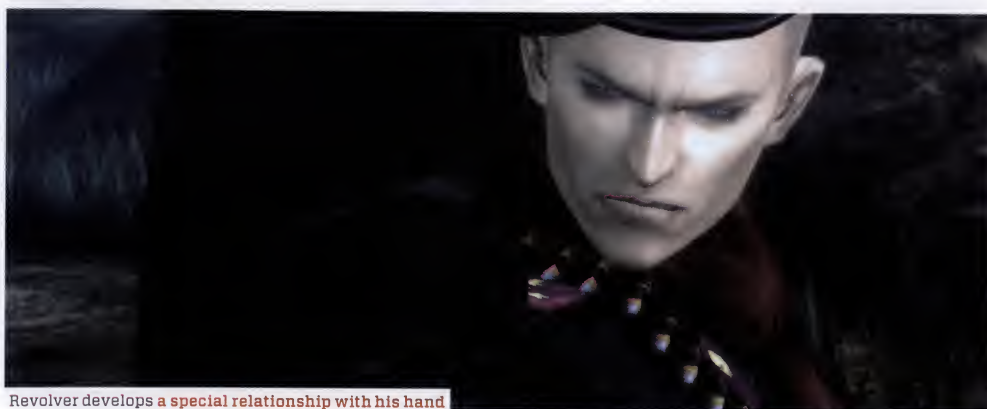
remember *Substance* as the somewhat apologetic reissuing that added in a whopping 500 standalone minigames to elongate *Son's of Liberty's* short runtime, a Skateboarding mini-game (just for the hell of it) and the all important Snake Tales. The latter was a bunch of Snake-centric stories designed to appease the punters who loathed the fact that Raiden was the main character. An old wound that has never fully healed for some.

Back in the day this was the first *Metal Gear* title on the PS2 and we've vivid memories of the inclement weather in the opening level blowing our minds. Obviously this HD remake doesn't engender the same sense of wonder nowadays, but there are a few moments when the spit polish shines just right. But just as often there are a few rogue textures or lighting bugbears here and there, not to mention the times where you'll see the strings of the old engine limitations in ways you never could on the PS2. This isn't perfect stuff, but for the most part *Substance* stands the test of time remarkably well.

The next offering in line is the content-laden variation of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, the less penis pun-friendly *Subsistence*. Many fans mark this as the pinnacle of the series and it's easy to see why; Kojima took us on a breathtaking trip back to 1960's jungle warfare, with incredible setpieces and the introduction of Solid Snake's precursor, Naked Snake.

Though *Subsistence* was just as verbose and melodramatic during the cutscenes, there was much more actual game to play in this third outing. Kojima weaves an emotional tale with some utterly memorable characters, but half of the fun here is messing around with nifty gameplay systems like matching yourself

"Not since Valve's *Orange Box* have we seen this much quality pressed onto one disc and this dirt cheap"



Revolver develops a special relationship with his hand



Hardest. Snake. Ever



Disarmed Snake like a bawsss



Vamp: predating the effeminate vampire craze by four years

to a camouflage meter, trapping wild animals and outwitting fools with a variety of era-specific gadgets.

There are a plethora of alternate boss strategies and cunning Easter Eggs to gleefully waste your time trophy hunting for. It's also worth noting that *Subsistence* is much more playable and polished a game when compared to *Substance*. Obviously, being one of the best looking titles on PS2 helps its visuals, but so too does the fact that it features a greatly-improved camera system.

But while this sequel may spin one of the greatest stories ever told on a PlayStation console, there's no denying that *Metal Gear Solid Peacewalker* gives it a run for its money in the gameplay department. *Peacewalker* really is the ugly duckling of this collection. Now that this PSP title has the grunt of the PS3 (and a second analogue stick) it spread its wings and stands out, even amongst its AAA siblings.

It's also notable in that it defies Kojima's habit of double releasing, by being jam-packed full of content from the get go.

You're still charged with sneaking about and snapping necks, but Kojima has skillfully woven in a *Pokémon*-inspired RPG henchman recruiting system. If that doesn't suck away all of your hours there's also an extremely robust multiplayer option that was only fully appreciated by the most diehard PSP AdHocers. These multiplayer missions are insanely good fun with the right people – and by 'right', we mean anybody who consents to jumping into your hetero Love Box.

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection is a no-brainer purchase. Sure the remastered PS2 titles make some rusty squeaks and melodramatic warbles from time to time, but those moments are massively outweighed by the hours upon hours of entertainment you'll receive from this package. Returning fans should acquire this safe in the knowledge that these are the best renditions of these classics we're ever likely to see. Newcomers should take heed of the hyperbolic praise from old-schoolers. Score this. You won't regret it.

Adam Mathew



Final Say

PRESENTATION Sketchy in a few areas, but it's understandable in terms of remaining faithful to the source material.

SOUND David Hayter can narrate our life. Packed full of iconic sounds and stirring orchestral moments.

CONTROLS Ranges from 'quite serviceable' right up to 'greatly improved on the original'.

REPLAY VALUE It's a shame the original isn't here, but this disc rivals *Skyrim* for sheer 'hours required to clock'.

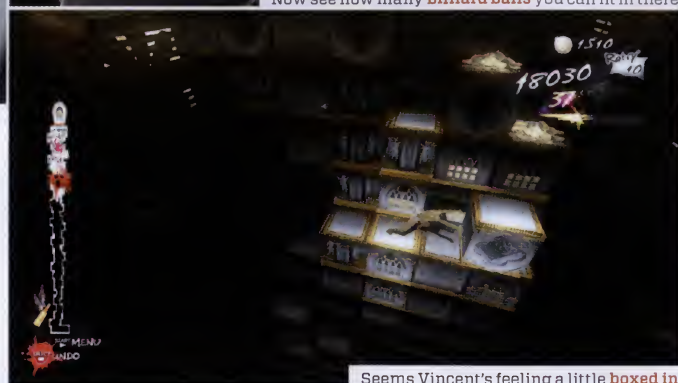
Verdict

If it had the original in it, this would be the benchmark for all HD remakes. Superb bang for buck.

9



"You'll spin a web of lies with Vincent's friends and strangers at the bar"



Catherine

Doing the dirty is good clean fun

Play this if you like

Persona, dating sims, sheep

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: PUZZLE

RELEASE: TBC

DISTRIBUTOR: QVS

DEVELOPER: ATLUS

PLAYERS: 1-2

RRP: \$99.95

For many of us, cheating in a videogame is commonplace, sometimes even a daily occurrence. Getting away with breaking the rules is a cinch thanks to the entering of a code, or the mimicking of some glitch video on YouTube. Well you can forget all that now. Trying to cheat in this game – specifically, on your potentially psychotic girlfriend – is an exercise in getting your genitals perma-banned.

You play as Vincent Brooks, a 32-year-old salaryman who's restless in his long-term relationship with Katherine (with a 'K'), a straight-laced and clingy girl. When she starts hinting at marriage Vince goes off the rails, gets off his chops in a bar called the "Stray Sheep" and wakes up next to Catherine (with a 'C'), a freewheeling, risk-taking sex panther. While frantically trying to cover up his dalliance, Vince's life becomes even worse when he's ensnared in a curse (or perhaps a guilt psychosis) that causes adulterous men to die from their nightmares.

Sounds like the makings of an RPG doesn't it? Well, *Catherine* proves just as duplicitous as its protagonist: this is in fact a puzzle game and an extremely difficult one at that.

The gameplay consists of two primary segments: the dialogue-heavy daytime, where you'll spin a web of lies with Vincent's friends and strangers at the bar, his workplace, or other assorted locations. The events here affect Vincent's overall alignment, which

determines the ending of the game, though the 'morality' system and choices are nowhere near as starkly obvious as a game like *Mass Effect 2*.

Leaving the assigned day location triggers a cutscene that'll effectively tally your interactions and then you'll go to bed and the nightmare puzzling sections begin. Locked in a surreal, sheep-filled world (where the woolies are other cheating men suffering the same predicament) Vincent must pull blocks into key positions to ascend a tower filled with traps that'll turn him into a lamb manwich in three shakes of his tail. Things get progressively insane as timers are shortened, a variety of special physics-warping blocks must be mastered and nefarious baddies and bosses are introduced.

Honestly, we found *Catherine* to be fairly enthralling, both in the old school challenge of its block-based conundrums and the addictive downward spiral of Vincent's narrative. Likewise, the quasi-RPG sections offer just enough exploration, offer endearing characters that are beautifully animated and lead to a variety of wacky endings to replay for.

Our main gripe is that the puzzles, and requirements to unlock bonus content, are astronomically hard. That said, there's a rare sense of elation to be felt whenever you crest that nightmare tower and get one step closer to getting away with your sly shag. *Catherine* is quirky, unique and not for everyone's taste, but we definitely think a lot of you will be pleasantly surprised by it. **Adam Mathew**

Final Say

PRESENTATION Lovely.

It's like playing an interactive anime. Changes from cinema to in-game graphics with great ease. Lip synch is a bit naff though.

SOUND Great English voice acting and features the regular deployment of smooth jazz. In a word: slick.

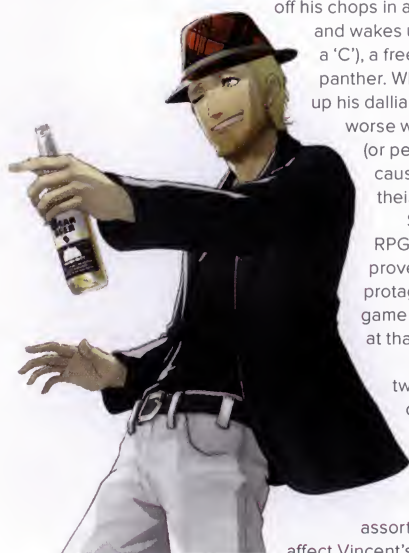
CONTROLS Using Vince's mobile to concoct multi-sentence SMS lies is a cinch, puzzle sections are tight and responsive.

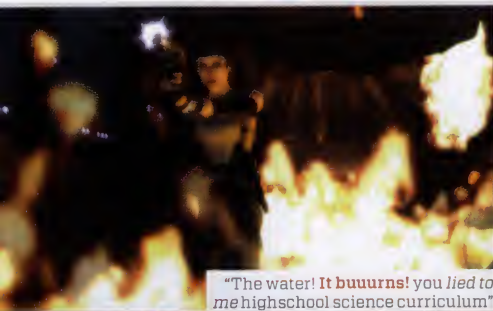
REPLAY VALUE Insanely difficult in spots, but never unfair. Has eight endings, ranging from 'Bad Cheater' to 'True Lover'. Multi is a bit of a non-event.

Verdict

Niche, but surprisingly addictive and challenging. Worth a look.

8

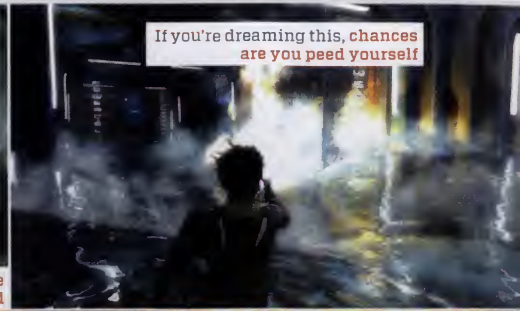




"The water! It buuurns! you lied to me highschool science curriculum"



Shown: cursophobia the unreasoning fear of being targeted



If you're dreaming this, chances are you peed yourself

Hydrophobia: Prophecy

Water waste



Keanu Science classifies this phenomenon as: H2Woahhh

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," goes the mantra. Developer Dark Energy Digital has taken this to heart, as *Hydrophobia Prophecy* is the third version of their game (over all platforms), re-worked, added to and improved for PS3, presumably based on feedback from critics and gamers alike. Pause the game and there's a menu for you to leave your own thoughts, positive and negative.

God knows what the original versions were like, because *Hydrophobia: Prophecy* feels pretty poor. It's the game equivalent of a C-grade, midday-movie with its lame characters, shoddy voice acting and cringe-worthy script, while the gameplay holding it all together is bits of nearly every other action-adventure game you've ever played.

You play as Kate Wilson, an Irish-accented systems engineer who finds herself in the middle of a terrorist attack on board The Queen of the World, a city-sized luxury liner built to house a chunk of the world's population. The group attacking the ship are a bat-shit bunch of extremists called the Malthusians who've decided the best way to solve mankind's plight of over-population is to go on a killing spree, using the ship's advanced tech against it. In Kate's ear is her superior Scoot, who's there via radio link to guide her through the fairly bland, exploding corridors as she climbs, shoots and

swims her way in and out of trouble.

Water plays a pivotal role in everything that you do, and you're often washing around in it, fighting against it as you open doors and using it against enemies. It's really incredible to see how it moves around (if sometimes implausibly), proving to be a feature worth talking about. The way it's used hints at something brilliant underneath.

We don't expect every game we play to be completely original, but *Hydrophobia* squanders many of the opportunities it has by being painfully generic. You'll dive under water and swim to the end of a tunnel, drop objects in water to make something else rise to the top, balance on beams and so on. Kate is apparently terrified of the wet stuff but her fear isn't truly realised as the way she gets on with the task at hand is in stark contrast to the stressed-out woman in the cutscenes.

Puzzles are fairly easy to solve, and they're sometimes mixed in with combat. Though you have a pistol on hand you'll flick electrical cables into water to shock the generic-looking Malthusians, push unconscious bodies into water so they drown, send explosive barrels on the crest of a wave to blow up. It sounds great but the clunky character models and boring interiors aren't encouraging.

Perhaps 'ambitious' is the absolute best thing we can say about *Hydrophobia Prophecy*. List its features and goals as bullet points and it sounds incredible, but in the end it H2-blows.

Paul Taylor

Final Say

PRESENTATION Great water effects but crummy everything else.

SOUND An amateurish script and strained voice-acting knackers any atmosphere built up elsewhere.

CONTROLS Standard fare, though the Move controls are truly abysmal.

REPLAY VALUE There's a score challenge to complete on each stage that involves finding collectibles and shooting barrels. Sounds like a chore.

Verdict

Nearly everything that *Hydrophobia Prophecy* does has been done better before, but not from lack of trying.

5

Play this if you like

Uncharted, Tomb Raider

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: DARK

DEVELOPER: DARK

ENERGY DIGITAL

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$10.95



TRUFAX: In Korea, *King of Fighters* is known as *Fist Men Extreme: The Fight Arena Squad*

King of Fighters XIII

A royal return to form, or regicide by suicide?

Play this if you like

BlazBlue: Continuum Shift

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: FIGHTING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: AIE
DEVELOPER: SNK
PLAYERS: 1-2
RRP: \$69.95

We took a scepter to the skull of *King of Fighters XII* last year. It felt old, bland, and clunky, and there was a notable dearth of modes. While it looks the same, *King of Fighters XIII* (KOF XIII) has added enough new ingredients into its knuckle sandwich to win the series back some respect.

KOF XIII features the same mash of fighters from *Fatal Fury*, *Art of Fighting*, and other SNK expeditions, and is still a sprite-based 2D brawler. Fortunately this year the developers have expanded on the series' surprisingly cavernous complexity to add new spice to their old dish.

Almost a mirror of *Street Fighter IV*'s Super and Ultra meters, KOF XIII peddles both a super move gauge and the new Hyper Drive meter. The former allows players to let rip with familiar super moves, but it also allows players to perform anti-rush down counter attacks and dodges similar to *Street Fighter Alpha*'s alpha counters. The latter allows astute players to enter into a "hyper drive" state and perform massive Neo MAX mega strikes to wipeout their opponent's life bar.

All this new fightin' booty can be sewn together into epically massive combos that require ascetic like dedication to execute. Unforgiving yet brutal, these complex commands are what keep the game addictive. Combined with a far more robust online mode (though disappointingly players still can't watch

What's the story?

KOF XIII serves as a guide on how not to tell a story. More Japanese than a hotdog vending machine, it's an incoherent mess about bad boy Ash Crimson (who flat out looks like a chick) double-crossing a deity from another dimension. Apart from the broken narrative, players will also have to endure screens of mundane text between characters prior to each round. Ditch the crap story, SNK, and just ring that damn ringside bell!



fights in progress from the lobby) there's meat here for fans.

That counts as a battle won for SNK, but it's not enough to win the war. KOF fans will likely hail this as the best release to date, but it's about 14 years too late.

Accessibility is still an issue. *Street Fighter IV* can be fun with casual players due to the beauty of its foundational fighting mechanics. Across standard strikes there's a sense of weight and impact. The block stun feels fair. Gaps for counter-attacking are finely tuned and intuitive. And standard combos feel satisfying. By comparison the mechanics in KOF feel second rate.

But if accessibility is a knee to the game's solar plexus, the lack of appeal is a Chuck Norris planet-splitting roundhouse to its head. The game looks crusty. The sprites introduced last year are pixilated and their animations limited. Plus the game lacks any creative flourishes during the massive super moves. We love the idea of a stunning 2D fighter, but there's no technical or artistic creativity here. Note to SNK – invest some money to make it look like a cartoon made by a ninja Walt Disney.

With new gameplay mechanics and an improved online mode, KOF XIII is an improvement over last year's shonky effort. But underneath the authenticity of its brand and long history, it hasn't evolved enough.

James Ellis

Final Say

PRESENTATION Fantastic backgrounds, but last year's new sprites are blocky, the graphical effects looks garish, and for a 2011 title this 2D totem should be pushing the animation envelope.

SOUND Awful '90s arcade cheese. The world has moved on. Buy some licensed tracks or take a page out of *SoulCalibur*'s book and get something properly orchestrated.

CONTROLS Despite lacking the fluidity of modern fighting games, there's a complex brawling engine here that demands insane frame-specific inputs for success.

REPLAY VALUE A better online mode than last year, plus new combos for the roster's 30 or so characters.

Verdict

KOF XIII might be the best game in the franchise yet, but it's esoteric in almost every way – and we don't think it needs to be.

6



A scene from our original new movie *Billy and the Dilophosaurus*. Copyright lawsuit: pending

Jurassic Park: The Game

Hold on to your butts

Play this if you like

Heavy Rain

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ADVENTURE

RELEASE: OUT NOW

DISTRIBUTOR:

TELLTALE GAMES

DEVELOPER: TELLTALE

GAMES

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$29.95

We're not ashamed to say we've watched this Spielberg classic 20-odd times. It stands the test of time quite well, but there's something in it that bothers us more than Samuel L being an IT geek who dies off-camera, like a bitch. We always watch the "goodbye, Newman" dilophosaurus scene and find ourselves wondering what happens to the ill-gotten dino DNA in Dennis Nedry's canister. As luck would have it, *Jurassic Park: The Game* offers us the OCD closure we've been waiting 18 years for.

Strewn across four 80 minute episodes, *JP* tells a quick-time-heavy tale that coincides with the main crisis moment of the first film. Your control – and we use the word lightly – will shift to multiple characters, though none of them will be familiar to all but the most diehard fans of the movie and Michael Crichton's novel. Essentially, this is a survival horror yarn that revolves around a greedy merc smuggler called Nima Cruz, Jurassic Park veterinarian Dr. Gerry Harding and his daughter, plus a bunch of secondary, dino fodder folk.

It sounds like a raptorlicious setup for a game, but *JP* is a six-foot turkey in the execution. The most glaring issue is the actual framework of the gameplay. If this was a point-and-click adventure like Telltale's previous efforts (e.g. *Back To The Future*) we'd be on-board the tour with bells on, but *JP* ends up being way too hands-off for our tastes. Telltale has cited *Heavy Rain* as a key influence in their design, but that game got away with being a quick-time fest as



All you had to do was *not* move to live, lady. How did you screw that up?



Getting to de chopper: **overrated tactic**

it made up the difference with an interesting, branching plot and sensual graphics. *JP* offers a ropey, one-size-fits-all story and the sort of graphics that'll make future scientists mistakenly identify it as a PS2 fossil.

Sound design isn't much better. The voice actors are decent enough, but their performances have either been poorly recorded or dodgily converted, our ears were frequently irritated by clicks, pops and strange pauses. Speaking of odd sound vacuums, *JP* regularly takes a 'silent movie' approach to its action scenes. You'll have the action on the screen – that, once again, you're barely controlling – along with some tense music and bugger all sound effects. It's either laziness, or somebody ran out of credit at Stock-sfx.com.

All told, *Jurassic Park: The Game* may be marketed to you as a new-age *Dino Crisis* and a wild ride, but in reality it plays more like John Hammond's dinosaur tour as it was originally intended. You're locked on a linear track and inelegantly chauffeured through dino dioramas that you'll have close to zero interaction with. The tour grinds to a halt for the occasional toilet break (read: light puzzle moments), but once that business is dispensed with, you're escorted back to your proverbial jeep on a scalextric track and the tour limps on. When it ends, half of you will want your admission money back. That being the case Mr. Hammond, after careful consideration, we've decided *not* to endorse your park. **Adam Mathew**

Final Say

PRESENTATION Very un-evolved. This looks as primitive as a PS2 title.

SOUND No John William's *Jurassic Park* theme? For shame. Only capable voice acting. SFX missing.

CONTROLS This is like ye olde arcade game *Dragon's Lair*, interactivity: minimum.

REPLAY VALUE You'll have difficulty slogging through it once, let alone a second time.

Verdict

A game from the land that time and fun forgot. Another wasted chance.

4

"Gentlemen, my autopsy results are conclusive. This man's **neck is missing**"

NCIS: The Game

Crime doesn't play

Play this if you like

L.A. Noire, NCIS the TV show

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ADVENTURE

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT

SHANGHAI

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$59.95

Just in case you're confused, *NCIS* is the TV show that has the goth chick in the lab. *CSI*, however, is the one where the guy delivers a one-liner, puts on his sunglasses before the opening 'YEEEEAAHH!' scream of The Who's 'Won't Get Fooled Again' blares out of your TV. If you needed this fact explaining to you, best to turn the page and move on, because this game requires fairly detailed knowledge of the show. This is for dedicated fans who happen to have a PS3 in their house, as well as a Move controller. Everyone else is going to be lost while they wonder why the hell Roger Daltry hasn't piped up yet.

Although the Move controls aren't compulsory, it's the logical choice for a point-and-click adventure such as this. You'll pick over evidence, and while getting the cursor in just the right spot would be better achieved with digital controls at times, there are a few sections where pointing the motion control that correlate with the thing on the screen pays off.

The game's split into four chapters, each set out like an episode in the show. Much like an episode it's pretty linear, with the jaunt offering the illusion of choice and chance whilst stymying any chance of really discovering anything for yourself. It feels like a game kids could waltz through as it's impossible to really fail, but the mature content means it's for people who stay up past 9.30pm.



We want to be this cool **and armed** when we get old



The likenesses are... **remarkable**

It's not as though it's loaded with action sequences that'll really push your skills, or make you feel like you're interacting with it beyond a fairly superficial level. You'll look at clues at the crime scene, send them to the lab, tie evidence together and confront the crim, taking control of the characters while they go through the motions. While it sounds exciting – match fingerprints, hack into a database, track a vehicle via GPS, scream "YYYYEEAA.... sorry, wrong show – it's often a case of matching pictures to other pictures, navigating a series of QTEs and so on.

When it comes to matching evidence you need to provide a causal link as to why they're connected, and you're given a multiple-choice selection. Some of these are moronic, removing themselves immediately from the pool. Maybe we're misinterpreting its sense of humour, as the show isn't totally po-faced.

You'll spend roughly an hour to an hour-and-a-half on each episode and once you're done, that's it. It's also one of the easiest games to rinse for trophies too, so if you're one of those people who's looking for an easy boost, you've found it. Everyone else, bred on a diet of *L.A. Noire* and *Heavy Rain*, will find this fairly pointless. **Paul Taylor**

Final Say

PRESENTATION

Awkward-looking character models shuffle around the screen. Does the job, and that's about it.

SOUND Only two of the characters lent their voices to *The Game*. The rest phone it in.

CONTROLS Mostly tidy with Move, but you won't kick yourself too much otherwise.

REPLAY VALUE Nil. Sorry. Grab the trophies and run.

Verdict

It's not utterly terrible, but you'll need to be very familiar with the show to really appreciate it. **Casual** fare for an undemanding audience.

5



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Here comes another one, just like the other one...



Shoot UFOs! Have no fun at all!



Humiliate yourself! Be a tool!

Give up on life! Hate your wife!

Play this if you like

Start the Party!

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: PARTY
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: SONY
DEVELOPER: SUPERMASSIVE GAMES
PLAYERS: 1-4
RRP: \$49.95

Finally, a Move title that isn't just a bunch of mini-games aimed at a casual audience... oh, wait, yes it is. Once again the PS3 and its high-tech wand of accelerometers is used to deliver a game that looks like it belongs on an iPhone.

Like the first *Start the Party!*, this one is aimed squarely at the primary schoolers. The kitschy cartoon style visuals and goofy narrator combine to deliver a package that your pre-adolescent niece will think is, like, totally awesome, but older gamers will find it utterly puke-worthy. There are 20 mini-games in total, around the same as the first game which was similarly criticised for not having enough content. Considering each game takes around two minutes to complete, it'll take eager beavers less than an hour to see everything.

The most interesting mini-games make use of a cool augmented reality feature, where the player is displayed on-screen but the Move controller has been replaced by a different, virtual object. These are by far the most playable, but they're in the minority, with the rest being forgettable throwaways that feel like they were created after mere minutes of brainstorming. Multiplayer now allows two players at once, but the secondary player is stuck doing extremely basic motions via the standard PS3 controller. While a handful of the mini-games are worth playing more than once, sadly the majority remain rather lame, and we're sure today's ADHD-infested kids will tire of them in no time. **Bennett Ring**

Final Say

PRESENTATION Think Pixar meets *SpongeBob Squarepants* and you'll get the drift.

SOUND A cheesy American narrator tries to make the games sound more fun than they really are.

CONTROLS Quite responsive for a Move game, but it often loses track of your gestures completely.

REPLAY VALUE Totem-tennis is more fun than the mini-games found here.

Verdict

The augmented reality tech is nifty, but it's let down by some rather bland game design.

5

Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest

Hack and slash gameplay at its wrist-slashing finest



Skele-tools kill them with fire



Ya'll git off mah land!

Play this if you like

The archery in *Sports Champions*

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER: SAN DIEGO
STUDIO/ZINDAGI GAMES
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$49.95

PlayStation Move has more than proved itself as a viable control method in the time since its release. Strangely, Move seems to be showcased best when it's offered as a secondary controller option in games such as *Killzone 3* and *SOCOM 4*. When a game is designed around its sole use, however, things tend to get a little uglier.

Case in point, *Medieval Moves*. You play as Edmund, a young prince who's waiting until the day that daddy carks it and he gets to rule the kingdom. But as gaming fate would have it, the realm is invaded by the nefarious Morgrimm who steals some precious stone and turns Prince Edmund into a skeletal version of his former self. You guessed it: that's where the puntastic 'Deadmund' name in the subtitle comes from.

However, before you even get to this lengthily presented backstory, you're thrown into the midst of an on-rails battle against a spiralling tower of skeleton warriors without explanation. The jarring beginning is more than made up for

with an overabundance of exposition and more lengthy cutscenes that occurred a little too regularly for our tastes.

To further taint the overall offering, the on-rails design of the first level continues throughout the game. In terms of melee combat, you're limited to swinging with one hand and blocking with the other (or simply pressing a button to block if you only have one Move wand). Enemies flag their attacks with military precision, while lazily slashing your way through the levels will get you from start to finish.

The real shining star of *Medieval Moves*, though is the bow and, considering the game was developed by the same team behind *Sports Champions*, this comes as little surprise. We regularly ditched the sword and shield in favour of the bow at every opportunity.

Medieval Moves isn't the worst game we've ever played, but it's needlessly repetitive and noticeably lacking in the fun department.

Nathan Lawrence

Final Say

PRESENTATION Cutesy graphics with waves of repetitive enemies.

SOUND Carnival-style music will get on your nerves quickly.

CONTROLS It works well enough as long as you accentuate your movements.

REPLAY VALUE Next to none. Considering how samey it is, you'll fight to get through it once.

Verdict

Medieval Moves is an okay Move title that's arrived at the wrong time of the year.

5

Move Fitness

Only works if you train to "Eye of the Tiger"

Play this if you like

Being a lean mean fighting machine

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: FITNESS

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR:

SONY COMPUTER

ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE

DEVELOPER: COLDWOOD

INTERACTIVE

PLAYERS: 1-2

RRP: \$49.95

There are always a slew of titles filling up the shelves targeted at the casual gamer with the hardcore contingent barely batting an eyelid at each new release. *Move Fitness* distinguishes itself from the pack by taking a slightly different path to make interactive exercise entertaining, physically challenging and more importantly... fun.

Each exercise breaks down the areas it will be targeting be it your core, arms, legs or heart rate, so you can tailor it to your problem areas. What makes *Move Fitness* so different is the balance it achieves between normal cardio like star jumps, jump squats or shooting jump shots and the genuine blast you'll have shattering blocks with your fists, sparring with your trainer, hitting the heavy bag or training dummy.



Not pictured: Dave throwing up from exhaustion

Special mention has to go to *Move Fitness*'s unique take on skeet shooting, which is less skeet shooting and more... skeet slashing. Guns are so last year. Armed with a virtual katana you'll slice and dice through scores of skeets on your way to a sleek physique. The best thing about it is that it lets you move at your own pace. This is all about light, repetitive training, the way it ought to be. It's about bringing up that heart rate to shred those love handles and replace last weekend's six-pack with an actual six-pack.

When you take into account the bargain basement price and what benefits you'll reap from it (assuming regular use), *Move Fitness* could be one of the wisest game purchases you ever make. The only down side is the need for two Move motion controllers – one for each hand – which does add a little sting to the price. Still, if you're looking for fun alternative ways to get your arse off the couch, *Move Fitness* will help you become that chiselled out of granite gamer you've always wanted to be. **Dave Kozicki**

Final Say

PRESENTATION

Functional. Nobody said workouts were pretty.

SOUND Cheesy but thankfully you can use your own tunes.

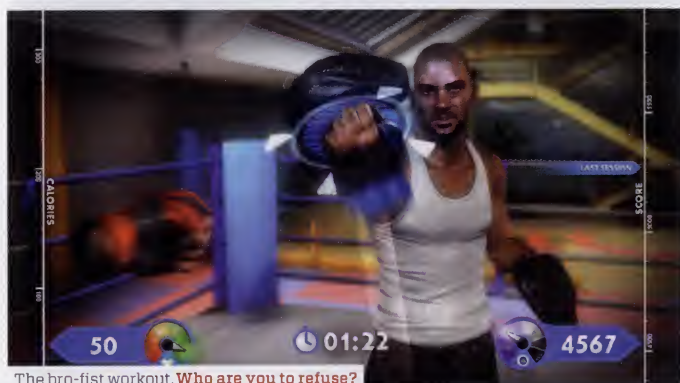
CONTROLS Responsive but sadly needs two motion controllers.

REPLAY VALUE Huge and the results will keep you coming back.

Verdict

A surprisingly addictive way to shed those winter pounds.

7



The bro-fist workout. Who are you to refuse?

PUMA: After Hours Athletes

Pub games without the fun drinking part

Play this if you like

Pretending to have a life

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: SPORTS

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

DEVELOPER: VARIOUS

PLAYERS: 1-8

RRP: \$49.95

Tied into a PUMA advertising campaign that doesn't seem to have run down under yet, this is yet another Move game for a casual audience. With only three games in the tin – Darts, Pool and Bowling – it's not quite a virtual Olympiad of mini-games, but the quality of each makes *Wii Sports* look like a DS game.

Compared to the rudimentary environments of most motion-controlled sports games, the richly rendered pubs and beautiful bowling alleys within are a sight to behold, putting your local run-down real world location to shame. Each mini-game has been built by separate developers, and they've all poured more polish than an overworked shoe-shiner into their endeavours.

Like all virtual pool games, the Move controlled version here struggles to capture the art of the real world game, where a keen eye and steady hand is replaced by the ability to master rather basic controls. Bowling is much more satisfying, and the Move's ability to accurately measure rotation means the spin within isn't just a load of, well, PR spin – it actually works. Darts sits somewhere between the two, and holding the wand like a sword just doesn't feel right. Besides, you can buy a real dart board for the same price as this game.

While the games on offer have more depth than the puddle-shallow gimmicks found in usual mini-game collections, you'll have to be an ardent fan of all three to really get your money's worth, and the slightly more complicated controls make it a bit too inaccessible for drunken party play.

Bennett Ring



Bowling: like a real sport, but for lazy people



TRUFAX: Darts is the dumbest game ever

Final Say

PRESENTATION

Detailed and realistic environments surpass the usual mini-game fodder.

SOUND The sound effects are minimal, but the catchy tunes will keep your ears happy.

CONTROLS Bowling is the best of the three, with the Move perfect for spinning.

REPLAY VALUE Like the real games, these can be played forever with friends or online.

Verdict

With just three games on offer, only the most devout virtual bowlers, pool players and dartsists need apply.

6

▶ WHAT'S NEW

PSN DEVELOPMENTS

What you can expect to see and play on the PSN

It might not be on your Christmas list just yet, but consider asking Santa for a larger download cap as the biggest games of the year get the biggest patches – and we have strong suspicion that at least one them is going to have at least one more to rectify the fixes it's made.

Battlefield 3 has hit with a 700mb-plus update that fixes a litany of issues and also balances gameplay. Some range from the minor (Fixed sound for when climbing ladders) to the major ('Fixed a bug on co-op mission "Exfiltration" where you could end up outside the vehicle and not being able to enter it again, thus blocking the mission', and 'Fixed a problem where a user can become invulnerable after being resurrected'). Crucial gameplay changes include decreased maximum damage and maximum range of the G3 and SCAR-H 7.62mm weapons, and increased range on all .45cal and 9mm weapons.

Skyrim's also been patched to version 1.2, as fans complained that the game starts to lag once their save file breaches 6mb. However, this new patch, according to posts on the Bethesda forums, has eradicated the benefits of using resistances. Resistances protect character and AI monsters and characters from various elemental harmful effects. Now, though, players take full damage regardless of what equipment or stat bonuses and perks they have. Also, some dragons fly backwards.

It is, of course, possible to not update to the new version, though you won't be able to log on to the PSN whilst doing so. Not that it matters since *Skyrim* is a single player game. Until Bethesda come up with



Dragons: they fly backwards now

a better, less broken patch, the solution seems to be 'do nothing'.

Finally, the PSN's 12 Deals of Christmas is just about to wrap up. Since the start of the month, deals have gone live on the store for 48 hours before disappearing up the virtual chimney at 12pm GMT (11am AEST if our time maths is right). Depending on how early you get this issue in your hands, the time frame for the deals looks like this:

- Christmas Deal 10 – 19th to 21st December
- Christmas Deal 11 – 21st to 23rd December
- Christmas Deal 12 – 23rd to 25th December

Good luck in grabbing a bargain. Let us and other readers know what you picked up on our Facebook page!



Broom, broom, boom

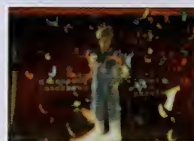
VIDZONE PLAYLIST SPOTLIGHT

THIS MONTH: Stereosonic 2011



EMBRACE - PNAU

Ladyhawke sings in a wedding dress as giant fruit dances on stage, no one notices the band. All par for the course.



WALKING ON A DREAM - EMPIRE OF THE SUN

Hipsters make residents feel awkward with their costumes and creepy dancing. This is why we can't have nice things.



WAY BACK HOME - BAG RAIDERS

Two guys experiment with abstract artistic methods and unwittingly rip off *Okami*'s paintbrush mechanic.

VidZone is the largest online music video VOD service in the world, and it's available **free** on PS3. Download the vidzone application and you'll have access to over 13,000 music videos at the push of a button!



PlayStation®Network

ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS



DAYTONA USA

For \$12.95 (or about six plays at the Time Zone) you get one of the greatest arcade racers ever made, polished and added to. Includes online play. Way cheaper than buying a cabinet, too.



SPACE INVADERS EXTREME

This PSP game has been out on UMD for a while, and we still love it. Loud, hypnotic and demanding, it's worth owning a PSP for. Honestly.



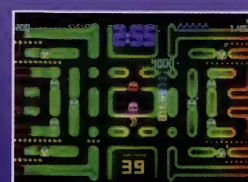
TEKKEN/RIDGE RACER 4

An odd bundle in one way (one of the earliest PlayStation games with and the other at the console's peak) but they're still robust. *Ridge Racer 4* is ace.



RDR & UNDEAD NIGHTMARE BUNDLE

One of our favourite games and add-on packs from last year, together for \$54.95 (\$49.95 and \$29.95 separately).



NAMCO GENERATIONS BUNDLE

Pac-Man Championship Edition DX and *Galaga Legions DX* team up. *Paccers* is the better game but they're both beautiful to look at.

WHAT IS PSN?

The PlayStation Network (PSN) is free to join and free to play. No subscription is required to play online. You'll be able to communicate with friends, access the PlayStation Store and download demos, add-ons, trailers, PSN games, PSone classics and blockbuster movies!



PlayStation®Network

TROPHY LIVES

You love games so much you may as well be hitched to them. Here's what you did to get your beloved trophies.



Michael Santarossa

Game: *Fallout New Vegas*

Trophy: Platinum Trophy



Got it by siding with Caesar's Legion. Modeled my guy on Wolverine and picked up the relevant story trophies. Love the Vault Boy trophy!



Elie Bourizk

Game: *Terminator Salvation*

Trophy:



Determined. Finally got my first platinum. It was easy, but I'm still proud of it.



Becca Irving

Game: *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*

Trophy: Julius Caesar



Just came back from Italy and decided to play the story mode again to get trophies!



Looks like a bit of a... skeleton crew. Eh? Eh? Ah forget it.

GENRE: ACTION **RELEASE:** NOW **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE
DEVELOPER: SUCKER PUNCH **PLAYERS:** 1 **RRP:** \$14.95

DLC > inFamous – Festival of Blood

Get ready to deliver some Cajun styled stakes

You'd think that after battling The Beast across the tri-island area of New Marais, either saving or damning his super charged conduit brethren, laying waste to a couple of thousand soldiers with ice water running through their veins and a cornucopia of mutated swamp things right out of the bayou that electric boogaloo powered Cole MacGrath would have earned himself a six pack and a night off.

Letting his hair down as Halloween partygoers overrun the streets with crazy costumes and more glo-sticks than a UK all-night rave seemed like the perfect way to let off some steam, and possibly get in a little romance? Unfortunately the apple of his eye decides to consummate their union, for all eternity. That's what you get for

messing about with an unholy vampiric demon spawn named Bloody Mary. Damn you RSVP. Damn you!

With eight hours on the clock to dust the original bitch from hell or forever join the ranks of the ultra-violetly challenged, Cole must come to grips with his batty new abilities, fend off her minions and break off their fledgling romance. That's Cole for ya. He's a heart breaker, life-staker and ain't gonna be tied down to any one woman.

Over the 2-3 hours you'll need to knock this puppy out, you'll master flight (powered by gorging on the blood of the innocent) as you take to the night sky amidst a sea of bat wings, use this ability to quick stake the emerging vampire cells, identify first-born vamps in disguise and reduce them to ash piles

and manufacture a she-bitch destroying cross before finally confronting Bloody Mary before sunrise.

Though a bit short, it plays completely differently to previous incarnations and is a fun wee jaunt. Your bandwidth will take a bit of a hit with the DLC coming in at around 4Gb for a mere couple of hours of gameplay, but that said you don't need the *inFamous 2* game disc to play it.

While *Red Dead's Undead Nightmare* could be appreciated as a stand-alone product, this is for *InFamous* fans.

VERDICT

Not as long or involved as we'd like but sure to get the blood pumping – and gushing.



PlayStation®Network

BEST GAMES TO PLAY ONLINE



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

DEVELOPER: INFINITY WARD/
SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES

PLAYERS: 1-16

Take MW2 and add in some insanely addictive contracts and inventive modes in the multiplayer proper. Solid shooter fun.



DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS

PLAYERS: 2-8

Excellent. You'll spend most amount of your time playing Tag and Trailblazer, and while it sounds slim it's indescribably addictive. Believe us when we say it's worth it just for this alone.



SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM

PLAYERS: 1-4

It's like being in the arcades (remember those?) when you had a bunch of lads and lasses hanging around, marvelling at your quarter-circle technique. Champagne gaming.



FIFA 12

DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS

PLAYERS: 1-22

Shooters aren't the only games that need explicit tactics, and the beautiful game is remarkably brilliant with 11 versus 11 matches. It's still as compelling and smooth as last year's effort. Get on it right now.



BATTLEFIELD 3

DEVELOPER: DICE

PLAYERS: 1-24

You'll be won over by the chaotic destruction and storming in to an enemy base on the back of a quad bike. You'll stay for the tactics. Team matches have little room for lone wolves, so play friendly or don't play at all.

► MODERN WARFARE 3

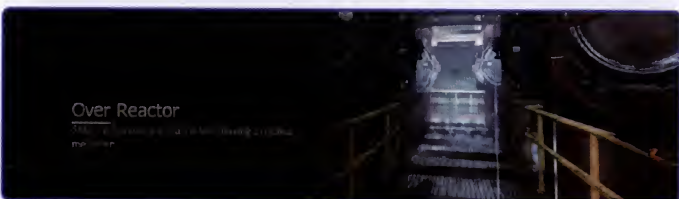
Spec Ops Guide

The bite-sized Spec Ops missions are tidy, structured skirmishes, and they're way more challenging than those in *Modern Warfare 2*. We've gone through all 16 missions and crafted top tips on how to beat them. Grab a mate and get stuck in!

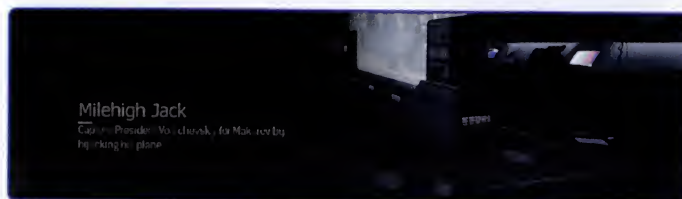
Easy Missions



1 ► Stay Sharp Test your skill on the obstacle course. 0:45 Swap your ACR for the P99 pistol then swap to the USP. Knife the target inside, go up the stairs and take down two targets with one shot. Get to the bridge and knock down targets from left to right, and then the targets on the upper platforms. In the final room, take targets from right to left, avoiding the civilian and Sandman.

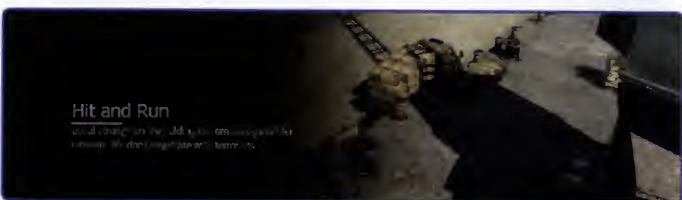


3 ► Over Reactor Stop the Russian submarine from having a nuclear meltdown. 6:00 Two enemies will run at you when you exit the chopper so cap them quick. Use the AA12 to your advantage – but be light on the trigger. Flash bangs are your friends in the sub's interior. Track elusive enemies by following their laser sights.



2 ► Milehigh Jack Capture president Vorchevesky for Makarov by hijacking his plane. 2:30

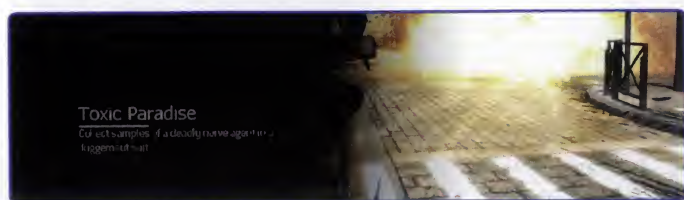
The mission gives you no time to prepare or choose your weapon so be ready for the first breach. Take out the targets from right to left, killing the two enemies in the middle with one shot. Leave the intelligence room and use flash bangs to daze the enemies, causing them to pop out of cover. Throughout the mission the plane will shudder and shake, making enemies stumble and fall over; this will not affect you so use it to your advantage. Hug the corners so you're never too far away from cover. When climbing the stairs, throw a flash bang and kill the enemies before they can reach cover. During the breach of the president's room, take out the targets from right to left, being careful not to miss the guy 90° to your right. As you kill the last enemy, the door straight in front of you will be breached. Spray the door and run to secure the president.



4 ► Hit And Run Local strongmen are holding our embassy staff for ransom. We don't negotiate with terrorists. 4:30

As you spawn, turn around and trade out your secondary for the stinger and grab your favourite LMG. Move along the balcony to your right and go prone to get the closest target in your sights. After taking him out, obliterate the incoming helicopter with the stinger. Stay on the balcony and take out the majority of the villagers. Proceed through the buildings until you're outside the second target's building. Lob grenades at him and proceed down to the hostages, taking refuge on the rusty ship and eliminating the contacts in the shipping port. Once you've secured the hostages, don't pop your smoke yet; proceed back to the top of the map and take out the incoming helicopter with the stinger before setting off the smoke. The villagers will not harm the hostages so just camp at the top of the map until evac arrives.

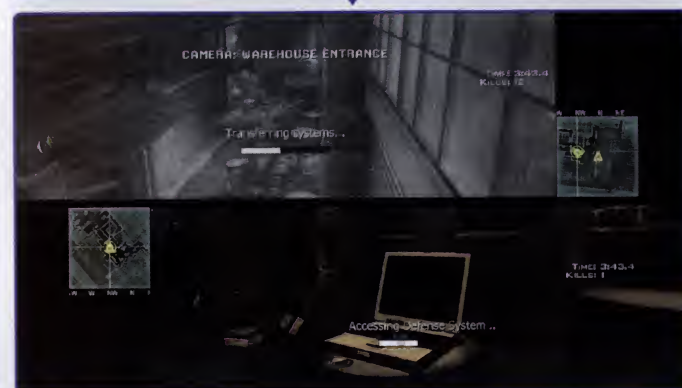
Normal Missions



1 ▶ Toxic Paradise Collect samples of a deadly nerve agent in a juggernaut suit. 8:00

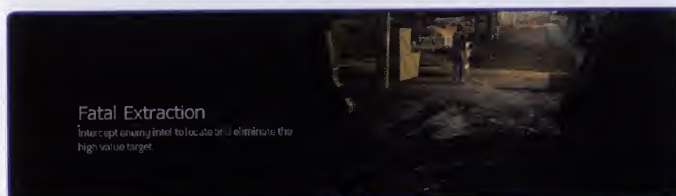
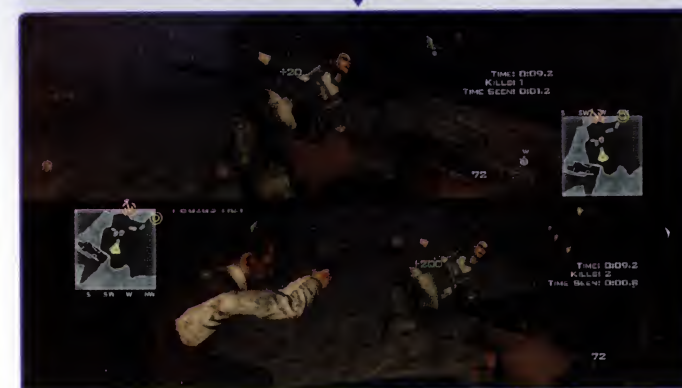
A few general tips: you can't go prone in the suit, so be smart about your cover. Immediately swap out your secondary for an AK-47 Grenadier. Keep an eye out for when you have an airstrike available as it has a cool-down period of about 30 seconds. Don't be intimidated by the small mission time, every kill you get will add precious seconds to it. Groups of enemies are fairly easy to take out with one well placed shot of the grenade launchers. Ready? Begin. As you spawn, pick off a few enemies as you head into the first building on your left. There's an enemy behind the wall to your left so flash the room beforehand.

Throw your air strike down into the lower level below you if you haven't already used it. Collect sample number two and move up. There is a Humvee waiting at the top of the stairs so take out the gunner before you head further up. Once in the broken building get your grenade launcher ready and fire into the second room for five kills. If you didn't get all five apply caution as there are enemy riot shielders ahead. Leave the building and you can destroy the second humvee on the right with your grenade launcher. Clear the courtyard, restock, and collect the remaining sample. Use your flash bangs on the Juggernaut in the alley and take him out either by spraying him with your LMG or use air support. When you reach the library head upstairs and throw your air support into the middle of the bottom floor. In the building after the library, use your remaining explosives on the riot shielders and head up to the finish.



2 ▶ Firewall Hack into security sentries and reach the subway in time. 4:00

The key to finishing this co-op mission alive is communication, else your teammate on the sentry will end up shooting you in the back. If you're on foot, tell the sentry gunner where to shoot and when. If you're playing as the sentry gunner, be sure to always stay one step ahead of your team mate knowing where he is at all times. By pressing **△** you can change sentry location, use this often to keep an eye on the situation. After you have hacked to the second sentry location, be sure to take out both helicopters before they can drop off troops, as this will allow the player on foot sprint through the area fast and easy.



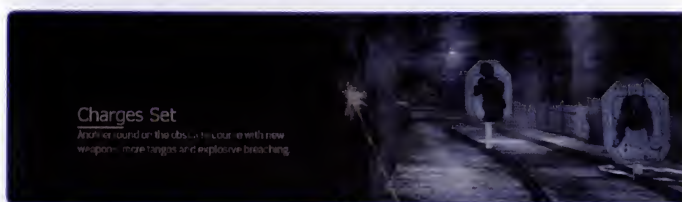
3 ▶ Fatal Extraction Intercept enemy intel to locate and eliminate high value targets. 5:30

Trade your secondary (the Five Seven) for an RSASS sniper rifle, and blast the target on the roof to the right. Continue to use your sniper and hybrid M4A1 to take out targets from long range, and stay on the upper ground until you've wiped out a large majority of the hostiles. Snipe both the sentry turrets before moving; a few RSASS rounds will disable them. Be patient with hyenas when you knife them; be too hasty and you'll end up with no neck. When an enemy drops intel, it isn't going to disappear so don't rush in and get yourself killed.

4 ▶ Hostage Taker Use stealth to save the President's daughter from Makarov's men. 3:00

Stay hidden, the mission becomes impossible when you are caught. Double tap enemies to make them deadlier than dead and only go for a guaranteed headshot. Make sure you keep an eye out for the helicopter spotlight. Best way to avoid it is by using the cover of the trees and shrubs. Hug the left hand side of the first section, and make your way behind the two guards executing a civilian via the tree line. Enemies are pretty stupid in this mission, so it doesn't matter which order you kill the guards in. They can witness their friend drop dead in front of them and still act surprised when you run at them with a knife.

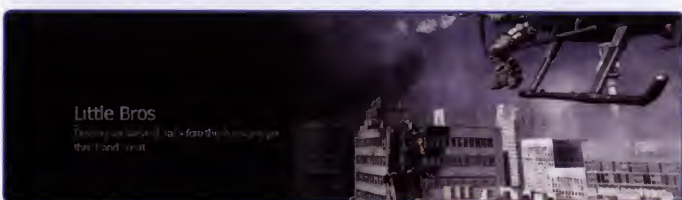
Hard Missions



1 ► Charges Set

Another round on the obstacle course, now with new weapons, more targos and explosive breaching. 0:45

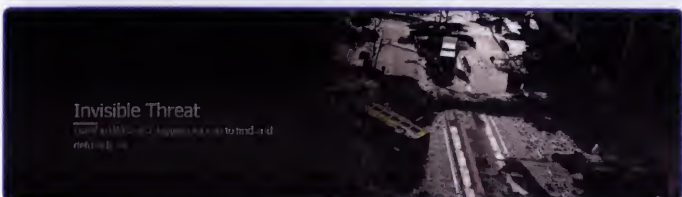
This obstacle course is exactly the same as the first one except that it's backwards. Grab the Five Seven and use it for the first breach. When you finish the breach, switch back to your USP and continue to take the targets out on the bridge. Switch back to the Five Seven and perform the next breach. When you finish the breach, swap again back to your USP and knife the target in the corridor. Take out the targets in the courtyard's first section, then switch back to your Five Seven to knock out the last targets. You have one bullet in each weapon spare.



3 ► Little Bros

Destroy sensitive data before Russians get their hands on it. 5:30

Straight off, run outside and straight back into your spawn to trigger the enemies. Wait and kill enemies here until the helicopter is ready to move up. Hop onto the helicopter up to the roof of the building and get ready to shoot foes that come through the doorway. Use flash bangs to help you get 'round and spray them up close. On the way down the staircase, pick a SPAS-12 from one of your unfortunate victims. The office section gets a bit tight, so be sure to utilise the maze of units and flank the enemy with your SPAS. When the enemy pops smoke grenades, activate your thermal vision. Finally, when planting the bomb, make sure to throw a grenade across the room to catch the enemies that spawn whilst you're planting.



4 ► Invisible Threat

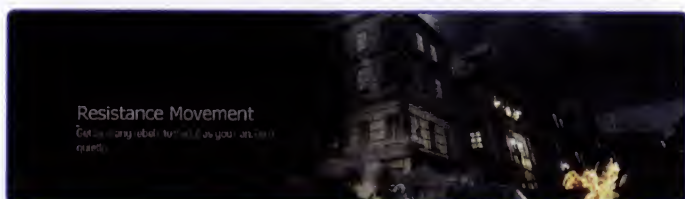
Use the UAV and juggernaut suit to find and defuse IEDs. 4:00

As you leave the spawn room use your predator drone to take out a group of enemies in a single stroke. A good hit should halve the number of contacts you will have to deal with, making the rest of the mission that much easier. Note, however, that the predator has around a 30-second cool-down time, so save it for when you need to clear out groups of enemies while using your flash bangs to get hostiles cowering behind cover. If you accidentally use the predator press **ⓐ** to cancel and put your laptop away. Obviously you should only attempt to

2 ► Resistance Movement

Get as many rebels to the LZ as you can. 5:00

Do this with a buddy and give each other targets. Take the first two targets out from the tunnel (they should be hovering around the left and right hand corners of the street). Move up to the line of cars and wait for the next group to move into line of sight (being careful not to shoot the hostage) and take them out. There's a hostage in the house on the right hand side of the street who's easy to miss as he's hidden behind the desk, but you can see the red objective glow around him. Taking the groups of guards out may take longer than you'd think as you have to wait for the opportune moment to line them up and get a collateral kill. Switch to your pistol when inside the building but headshots are *de rigueur*.



diffuse an IED when you're certain that there are no hostiles in the vicinity. Your secondary weapon is a grenade launcher, a versatile boomstick that's very handy for taking down enemies that are out of your line of sight. A well-placed grenade will also destroy the enemy helicopter at the end of the mission in one shot, so that's nice too. Use the predator on the tank and attempt to defuse the last IED before the chopper can reach the area.

Veteran Missions

Server Crash

Battle your way to Volk's hideout and download his master plan.

1 ► **Server Crash** Battle your way to Volk's hideout and download his master plan. 7:00

Use your SCAR-L's underslung grenade launcher when you're on the back of the Humvee, it has the same stopping power and will still destroy a vehicle in one shot, but with a smaller reload it is safer to use. Switch between the underslung grenade launchers so you don't have to reload in tight situations with groups of enemy vehicles on your tail. By the time you reach the sewer, the enemies have already set themselves up in cover. Use flash bangs and your explosives to get behind them and take them out. Don't rush your corners, make sure you have full health before turning the next one. As you start the download, run across to the opposite side of the room and camp there so you still have an eye on the downloader but aren't getting caught in crossfire.

2 ► **Smack Town** Relieve local militia of their contraband. 8:00

When taking out targets from the helicopter, go for multi-kills with the grenade launcher. When you start to circle the first building, switch to your PKP Pecheneg to take out the enemies on the rooftop. When you land, take out enemies with your PKP and then trade it out for an AS50. Proceed up towards the broken ship, and take out the next building through the gaps of the destroyed ship. Slowly make your way through the next building checking your corners. Some enemies on the balconies are hard to hit; aim for the wall behind them with your M4A1's grenade launcher. Head across the road to the building in the centre of the map, climb up the ladder and make your way to the objective. After you plant the C4, watch for hostiles on the opposite roof. Jump down to the right of the C4 and detonate it. Backtrack across the rooftops until you start getting shot at. Use the sniper here to take out the villagers. Head back the way you came, taking your time to get to the LZ.

Flood the Market

Find the encryption codes in the Stock Exchange and upload them to CENTOCOM.



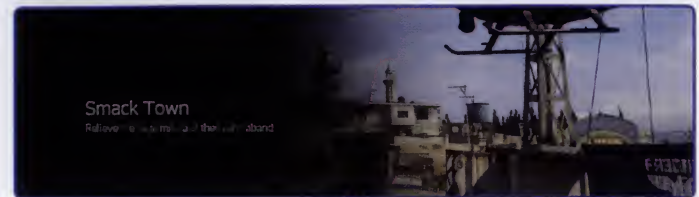
3 ► **Flood The Market** Find the encryption codes to the stock exchange and upload them to CENTOCOM. 8:30

This one's best played with a buddy taking advantage of the high ground using the hybrid scope on the M4A1, picking off enemies who pop out of cover. There are two enemy vehicles outside the first area. One shot from the XM25 will destroy them both. When inside the stock exchange use flash bangs to bring enemies out of cover, and the XM25 to take them out quickly. We recommend not using regular weapons due to the amount of cover the enemies have – explosives are the way to go. When you reach the communication tower, grab a sniper rifle, but make sure one of you still has an assault rifle. Take out enemies across the street until the carrier helicopter arrives, then switch to your XM25 and shoot through the door on the side of the chopper as it drops down the ropes. If done right, you should get all eight hostiles. Take cover near the communication tower when the RPG barrage starts, and hold there until the upload finishes.



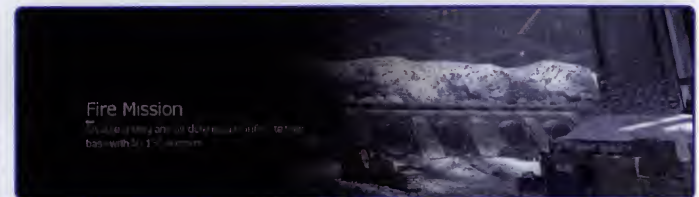
Smack Town

Relieve the militia of their contraband.



Fire Mission

Disable enemy anti-air defence and infiltrate their base with AC-130 support.



4 ► **Fire Mission** Disable enemy anti-air defence and infiltrate their base with AC-130 support. 2:30

As you both spawn, the player on the ground should run left to avoid friendly fire from the AC-130 gunner who can now safely take out the two technicals at the spawn. When you reach the courtyard and are walking past the first pillar, enemies will spawn to your left. Take cover and let the AC-130 take them out. When they're down, sprint to the door and place the C4. Cover in the container and switch to your G36C. The enemies will spawn in a line so a quick spray from the hip should take care of them. After you have opened the warehouse doors, run around to the right hand side of the hanger door and communicate to avoid friendly fire.

▶ MUST WATCH

Hanna

DIRECTOR: JOE WRIGHT **STARRING:** ERIC BANA, SAOIRSE RONAN, CATE BLANCHETT, OLIVIA WILLIAMS, TOM HOLLANDER
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

When the action kicks off in this tense, tight thriller, it does so with lightning-quick ferocity, focussing on 16-year-old Hanna (Ronan) whose ex-CIA father Erik (Bana) has trained her to be an assassin. His methods are sometimes extreme as he tests her physical and mental agility, but as a result she's a fine killer, but lacking as a human being.

After hiding out in snowy forests buried in the middle of Finland, Hanna's pushed into the real world and secret agent, Marissa (Blanchett) is tracking her down. The chase is on, but Marissa has secrets of her own that she's trying to keep hidden.

As Hanna and Erik are pursued across Europe, Hanna faces her ultimate test – whilst also adjusting to life in the real world.

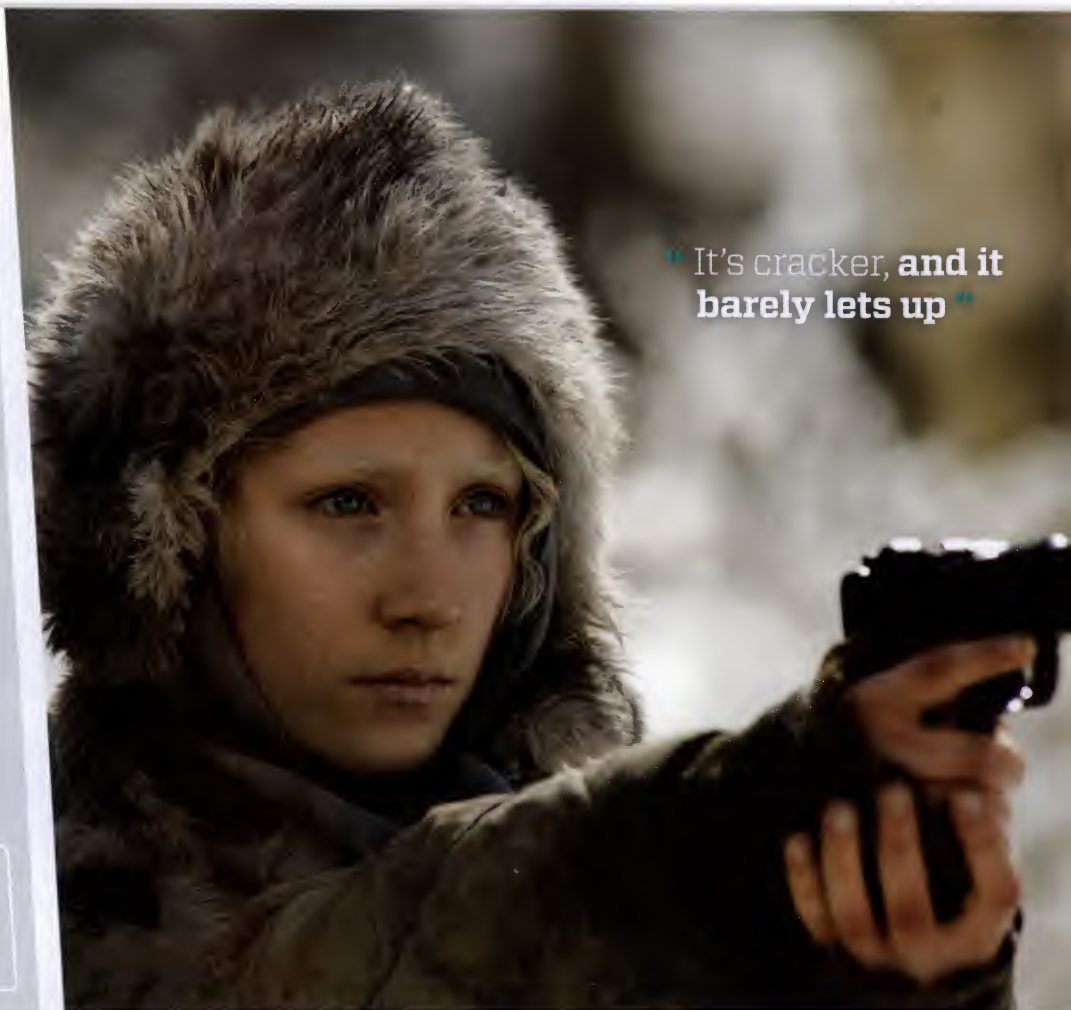
It's cracker, and it barely lets up. The Chemical Brothers provide a driving score that keeps things on the boil, and there are a few amazing action sequences. Yet it's smart and grounded, and although the story itself isn't new the way it's handled is fantastic.

Watch this if you like *The Bourne* movies

Verdict

This ripping thriller is cooler than you'd ever think, with a few funny bits in between the tense action.

8



"It's cracker, and it barely lets up"



Dinoshark

DIRECTOR: KEVIN O'NEILL **CAST:** ERIC BALFOUR, IVA HASPERGER, AARÓN DÍAZ, HUMBERTO BUSTO
AVAILABLE: (OWN) \$ 24.99, 1315MB (SD)

Dinoshark is a movie about a dinoshark. A dinoshark is like a shark, but also a dinosaur. It is also very, very stupid looking.

So anyway, what happens is that the dinoshark breaks free from some ice because of global warming (topical!) and then swims to a resort town in America and kills a bunch of people. To begin with everyone thinks it's just a regular shark, but one man – played by a guy you might vaguely recognise from the television – knows the truth and sets out to stop the monster by throwing grenades at it from a jetski.

This is not a joke.

This is what actually happens. The only thing that's clever about *Dinoshark* is the way that it takes money from people. Avoid this at all costs.

Verdict Hey guys, what if there was, like, a shark... but it was also a DINOSAUR? Whooooooh.

1

PlayStation Store

▶ TOP TEN

Movies on Demand



- 1 **Bridesmaids** Universal Pictures
- 2 **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2** Warner Bros
- 3 **Cars 2** Disney Pixar
- 4 **Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides** Walt Disney Pictures
- 5 **The Eagle** Focus Features
- 6 **Thor** Paramount Pictures
- 7 **X-Men: First Class** 20th Century Fox
- 8 **Source Code** Hopscotch
- 9 **Kill the Irishman** Anchor Bay Entertainment
- 10 **Rio** 20th Century Fox

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The PlayStation Network Video Store offers hundreds of titles available to rent or own at the click of a button!



The Guard (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: JOHN MICHAEL MCDONAGH **CAST:** BRENDAN GLEESON, DON CHEADLE, LIAM CUNNINGHAM, MARK STRONG **AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

God bless you John Michael McDonagh. After penning the screenplay for the Aussie flick *Ned Kelly* you disappeared off the map only to return almost a decade later with your directorial debut in the offbeat cop comedy *The Guard*. 'Tis a simple tale of a rough around the edges Irish law enforcement type Sgt. Gerry Boyle (Gleeson) who teams up with a by the book FBI Agent Wendell Everett (Cheadle) to take down a drug smuggling operation. Boyle isn't exactly a poster child for protecting and serving with a penchant for hookers, an occasional drug habit and a tendency to drop a racial slur all in the name of fun. The tension and chemistry between Cheadle and Gleeson is electric as is the supporting cast of criminals headed up by Liam Cunningham and the rock solid Mark Strong.

Watch this if you like *Hot Fuzz*

Verdict An against type and unique film with brilliant cast cohesion and a laugh riot to boot.

9



Priest (M)

DIRECTOR: SCOTT CHARLES STEWART **CAST:** PAUL BETTANY, KARL URBAN, CAM GIGANDET, MAGGIE Q, CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER **AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

In theory, it's an absolute no-brainer. Paul Bettany as the warrior Priest hot on the trail of his captured niece leading him to a former brother of the cloth, now unholy abomination and vampire lord known as Black Hat, ever so wonderfully hammed up by Karl Urban. Girl power comes into effect with the dynamite package of Maggie Q's Priestess and it looks like all the bases for action kickassery are covered. Not by a long shot. By focusing on the dull and particularly uncharismatic side character Hicks (played by tween idol Cam Gigandet) instead of shining the spotlight on a simple "former comrades now enemies" scenario to let Urban and Bettany duke it out while the audience breathes in the awesome, all that the finished product elicits is a yawn and overwhelming desire to see the end credits roll. In short: great idea, terribly executed. What a shame.

Watch this if you like disappointment

Verdict Scott Charles Stewart brings his *Legion* sensibilities over to *Priest*, and that is not a good thing.

5



Torchwood: Miracle Day (MA15+)

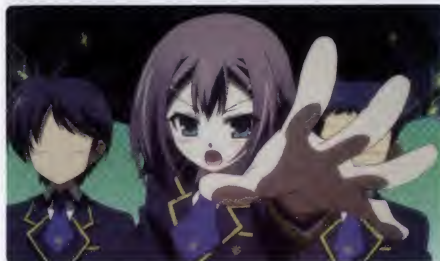
DIRECTOR: VARIOUS **CAST:** JOHN BARROWMAN, EVE MYLES, MEKHI PHIFER, ALEXA HAVINS, BILL PULLMAN, WAYNE KNIGHT, JOHN DE LANCIE **AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

After slaughtering most of its key cast members, *Torchwood* was ripe for a new start and kicks off in usual adult territory. Convicted pedophile Oswald Danes is facing a lethal injection when the impossible happens. He doesn't die. And he's not the only one. The world over, death has simply ceased to be. Overpopulation and disease from deceased yet still living bodies is rampant while governments scramble to figure out what exactly is going on. Meanwhile the immortal Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) is now painfully mortal and coming to terms with his newfound frailty. How exactly are these two events linked? Is it coincidence or something more sinister?

Watch this if you like *Torchwood* or *Doctor Who*

Verdict Lacks the charm of previous series and lacks convincing American characters.

6



Baka and Test - Series One Collection (M)

DIRECTOR: SHIN ONUMA **CAST:** HIRO SHIMONO, HITOMI HARADA, AKIO OHTSUKA, AYANA TAKETATSU, EMIRI KATOU **AVAILABLE:** DVD

The latest permutation of anime's undying obsession with high school romance, *Baka and Test* tries to put a fresh spin on a genre that has in recent years has become Baroque beyond recognition. We enter a world of pastel-haired, panty-crazed youths who attend a unique school where they can improve their academic standing by taking part in 'Summoner Test Wars', cyber-battles where their report cards come alive like they were Pokémon. These chibi deviants fight for kudos – and more importantly, the right to use the best classroom equipment. It's Dux vs. Duncie, in a fruity whirlwind of sight gags and skirt-ruffling draughts.

Watch this if you like *Bamboo Blade*

Verdict Meta as anything; an above-average ecchi show, with lashings of *Pokémon*.

7



Redline (M)

DIRECTOR: TAKESHI KOIKE **CAST:** TAKUYA KIMURA, YUU AOI, KOUJI ISHII **AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Part *Wipeout* 2097, part *Death Race* 2000, part *Aeon Flux*, *Redline* plunges viewers into the lurid street racing scene of the distant future. The innumerable loopy aliens of a corrupt cosmos are fixated on an underground tournament where degenerate cyborgs spit homing missiles and abuse from their preposterous super-charged hot rods. What this means for you, the viewer, is a nitrous boost of gangster movie clichés re-packaged with surreal animation, eye-popping designs, and Japanese punk rock attitude. Colour and movement spurt from the screen in quantities designed to sting your retinas and leave a pearl necklace on your preconceptions. In short, it's flabbergasting. A trip by itself, we shudder to think what this film would be like on drugs. Oh, and there's boobies too. And the hero's haircut is giving us nightmares...

Watch this if you like *Dead Leaves*, *Ninja Scroll*

Verdict Sci-fi racing from the guy who did *Afro Samurai*: Sex on wheels.

9



Darker Than Black Season 2 Collection (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: TENSAI OKAMURA **CAST:** HIDENBOU KIUCHI, IKUYA SAWAKI, KANA HANAZAWA, KIYOMI ASAI **AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

What if the X-Men all had obsessive/compulsive disorder? That's the fundamental question posed by *Darker Than Black*, an anime series where espionage and supernatural powers collide. In this near-future world certain gifted individuals pay for their powers (teleportation, weather control, electricity bolts, etc.) via quasi-Faustian bargains. One such 'Contractor' might, say, have the power to fly, but be compelled to break one of his own fingers every time he does so. At its best, this series feels like a bitter-sweet mix of *Blade Runner* and *Highlander*. Unfortunately, this high-concept format is held back by plenty of unlikeable characters and messy plotting.

Watch this if you like *Darker Than Black*

Verdict Super-spies with super-powers; Jason Bourne meets Connor MacLeod.

7

▶ NOW SHOWING

The Adventures of Tintin (PG)

DIRECTOR: STEVEN SPIELBERG **CAST:** JAMIE BELL, ANDY SERKIS, DANIEL CRAIG, SIMON PEGG, NICK FROST **IN CINEMAS:** 26TH DECEMBER

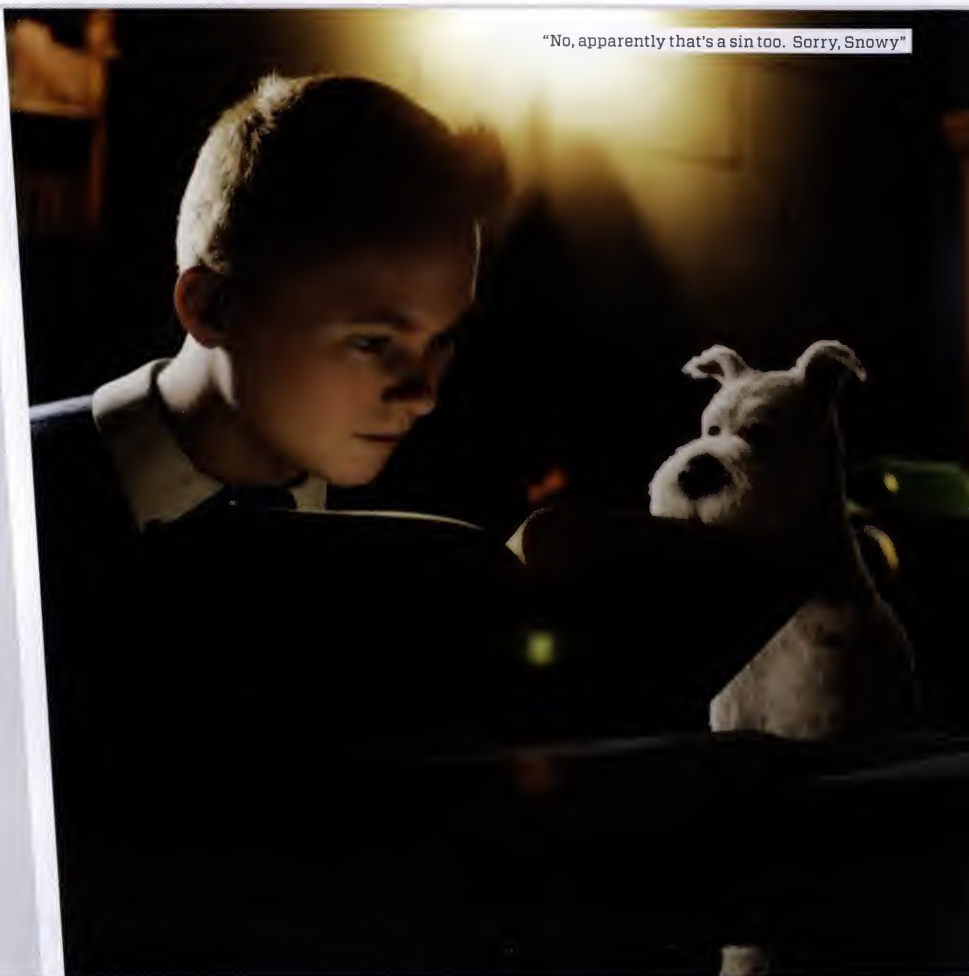
For those not old enough to have had firsthand cinema experience with the immortally awesome *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, here's your chance to feel a similar magic on the silver screen. While *The Adventures of Tintin* mightn't hit the lofty perfection of *Raiders*, it does encompass that beautiful sense of adventure, even if it is a bit slow at the start.

As you might expect from the title, *The Adventures of Tintin* follows the action-packed journalistic adventures of the oddly named Tintin (Bell) along with his mutt, Snowy. After Tintin purchases an old model man o'war from a street stall, he attracts a lot of unwanted attention from villainous types with nefarious intentions.

Ever the inquisitive mind, instead of running away, Tintin rushes headlong into what he believes will be the story of his young career. Shootouts, car chases, high-sea hijinks and good ol' fashioned fisticuffs ensue. Along the way, Tintin befriends the perpetually drunk Captain Haddock (Serkis) and aggravates the sinister Ivanovich Sakharine (Craig) wherever he trots on the globe.

With Peter Jackson behind the scenes in a producing role, Weta Workshop (*Lord of the Rings*) producing the visual magic and Steven Spielberg in the director's throne, it's unsurprising that *Tintin* works so well. The fully computer animated sequences that make use of motion-capture performances by many a familiar-sounding actor are breathtaking and allow Spielberg to cut together a family friendly adventure in such a way that it has to be seen to be believed.

Watch this if you like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Beowulf*



"No, apparently that's a sin too. Sorry, Snowy"



"I love you, Sarah Jessica Parker"

War Horse (M)

DIRECTOR: STEVEN SPIELBERG **CAST:** JEREMY IRVINE, TOM HIDDLESTON, BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, EMILY WATSON, PETER MULLAN, DAVID THEWLIS **IN CINEMAS:** 26TH DECEMBER

Perhaps the most amazing thing about Boxing Day this year isn't that Steven Spielberg has two competing film releases; it's that one of these films rocks and the other is a broken rocking horse. *War Horse* is the one that sits on the ugly side of the paddock.

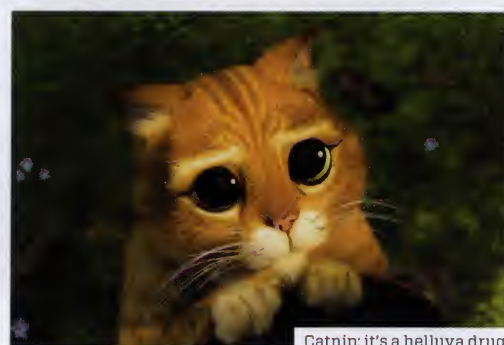
Where *The Adventures of Tintin* has Spielberg's magic touch all over it, *War Horse* is strangely devoid of the maestro's directorial prowess from start to finish. Sure, there are occasional moments of Spielberg, but they are few and far between. And when you're dealing with a 140-minute runtime, these few magic moments don't justify the price of admission.

War Horse follows the story of a teenage boy, Albert (Irvine), and the bond he forms with a horse, Joey. After establishing the boy-horse bond, Joey is sold to a British Army officer (Hiddleston) at the outbreak of World War I to

alleviate Albert's family's money woes and Albert promises to track Joey down.

Wherever Joey goes, most of the four horsemen of the apocalypse follow. In fact, short of Pestilence, you'll witness cameo appearances from War, Famine and Death long before the credits roll. The problems start early on, though, particularly in the attempts to make Joey a character instead of a narrative device that carries the plot forward. It's one thing to relate to the lamentations of a human character as powered by a thespian with decent acting chops, it's another thing entirely to expect the audience to empathise with a horse's emotional range.

There's a little bit of war in there and a few laughs but, by the end of the race, *War Horse* comes across as a steed that should have been covered with a sheet and shot before it ever hit the silver screen.



Catnip: it's a helluva drug

Puss in Boots (PG)

DIRECTOR: CHRIS MILLER **CAST:** ANTONIO BANDERAS, SALMA HAYEK, ZACH GALIFIANAKIS, BILLY BOB THORTON, AMY SEDARIS **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

The first two *Shrek* films were able to successfully adopt the *Sesame Street* formula that works so well for kid's films: make movies that appeal to adults as well as children. By the time the fourth *Shrek* film rolled around, the series had well and truly ditched this delicate and clever balance.

Unfortunately, *Puss in Boots* is closer to the third and fourth *Shrek* movements than the first two outings. Antonio Banderas lends his iconic and pitch-perfect voice once more to the titular *Puss in Boots*, and has some talented support from the likes of Salma Hayek as the love interest, Kitty Softpaws, and Zach Galifianakis as the turncoat friend, Humpty Dumpty.

While the pitch is positively *Shrek*, the humour is essentially all childish, the usual Far, Far Away locale has been misplaced and, unlike most spinoffs, there are no cameos from other *Shrek* characters.

As one of the more memorable side characters of the core *Shrek* films, Puss in Boots deserved a lot more love with his own movie that simply isn't there in the brief 90-minute runtime.

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index

ABOUT THE INDEX

Check out our handy index of all the PS3 titles we feel you should play (and some you shouldn't). Please note: scores are a reflection of a game's comparative quality at the time of release and will not change – but the index may be updated as titles age or are superseded by new games.

ACTION

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand 7
SWORDFISH STUDIOS
So dumb it's dangerously good. Better than it sounds.

Captain America: Super Soldier 4
NEXT LEVEL GAMES
Beguilingly awful, from the poor graphics to the will-sapping combat and platforming.

Alien Breed 3: Descent 7
TEAM 17
Top-down twin-stick affair that doesn't do enough to improve upon its predecessors.

Army of Two: The 40th Day 7
EA MONTREAL
Still bone-headed but a lot tighter and more fun than the original *Army of Two*.

Avatar 7
UBISOFT MONTREAL
One of the first 3D games. Dull, now.

RECOMMENDED Bayonetta 9
PLATINUM GAMES
It takes balls to make a game this violent, sexy and weird.

RECOMMENDED Beyond Good & Evil HD 8
UBISOFT
It's aged graphically but still remains one of the most charming games ever.

Bionic Commando 7
GRIN
The great moments are few and far between.

RECOMMENDED BloodRayne: Betrayal 8
WAYFORWARD
A classy and colourful beat-'em-up that rewards exploration.

The Bourne Conspiracy 7
HIGH MOON STUDIOS
Great presentation and vibe, samey action.

RECOMMENDED Castle Crashers 8
THE BEHEMOTH
Violent but classy side-scrolling cartoon RPG-action. Best played in co-op.

RECOMMENDED Child of Eden 8
Q ENTERTAINMENT
You need a Move controller to wring the best out of this weird and wonderful blaster.

The Club 8
BIZARRE CREATIONS
Original, compulsive and fun.

Damnation 3
BLUE OMEGA ENTERTAINMENT
Uninspired level design, broken gameplay.

Dark Void 6
AIRTIGHT GAMES
Uninpiring graphics, lacklustre sound and dull, dull combat.

RECOMMENDED Dead Rising 2: Off The Record 9
CAPCOM VANCOUVER
A totally fresh update. If you missed it first time around, grab it now.

Dead to Rights: Retribution 6
VOLATILE GAMES
Fine, but doesn't do enough to stand out. Needs more dog.

Devil May Cry 4 7
CAPCOM
Memorable bosses but prepare to backtrack.

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon 5
VICIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE
Ugly, repetitive and about 10 years out of date.



El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

DEVELOPER: IGNITION TOKYO
DISTRIBUTOR: MINDSCAPE. **PLAYERS:** 1
8
"Probably the most breathtakingly beautiful and aesthetically inventive game on the PS3 so far. It flits between genres and will hook you into its deceptively deep combat system that demands creativity to fully master."

RECOMMENDED Final Fight: Double Impact 8
PROPER GAMES
Two games in one. Forget about *Magic Sword* and instead just dive into *Final Fight*.

RECOMMENDED Galaga Legions DX 8
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
Bullet hell made pretty.

Genji: Days of the Blade 5
GAME REPUBLIC
Flashy graphics, giant enemy crabs, piss-poor plodding gameplay.

RECOMMENDED Ghostbusters: The Video Game 9
TERMINAL REALITY / THREEWAVE SOFTWARE
Robust, charming and impeccably presented.

RECOMMENDED House of the Dead: Overkill - Extended Cut 8
HEADSTRONG GAMES
Has its tongue so far in its cheek it's almost poking out the other side. Requires Move.

Hunted: The Demon's Forge 7
INXILE
A textbook example of 'alright'. Co-op rules.

John Woo Presents: Stranglehold 7
MIDWAY CHICAGO
Packs frantic *Max Payne*-lite fun.

ESSENTIAL Just Cause 2 9
AVALANCHE STUDIOS
Parachutes. Grappling hooks. Stripper zeppelins. An insane action game.

Kane & Lynch: Dead Men 6
IO INTERACTIVE
Gets close to greatness before crashing back down.

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days 7
IO INTERACTIVE
Michael Mann/YouTube visuals? Great. The game? Average.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames 8
PANDEMIC STUDIOS
Weak in many areas but has fun in spades. *The Saboteur* does it better, though.

Ninja Gaiden Sigma 8
TEAM NINJA
Violent but ace, despite its age.

RECOMMENDED Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 8
TEAM NINJA
A sexy and rock hard title but the gore's been cut.



Pac-Man Championship Edition DX

DEVELOPER: NAMCO BANDAI
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
PLAYERS: 1
9
"An evolutionary sequel that will put blisters on your eyeballs and thumbs. Hypnotically addictive and absolutely value packed, it's one of the best games you can buy on the PSN."

NEW RECOMMENDED PixelJunk SideScroller 8
Q-GAMES
Old school fun meets new age design in a blaster that's very tricky.

RECOMMENDED Prototype 8
RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
A simple superhero kill-fest but a truckload of guilty fun.

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One 7
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Chaotic, confusing and a bit dull.

Red Faction: Armageddon 7
VOLITION, INC.
Brown, corridor-based action that will leave you snoring. Get *Guerrilla* instead.

RECOMMENDED Red Faction: Guerrilla 9
VOLITION, INC.
The best destruction effects ever, hands down, with loads to see and do.

RECOMMENDED Renegade Ops 8
AVALANCHE STUDIOS
A sleek twin-stick shooter with split screen and furious competitive four player co-op.

NEW Rocketbirds: Hardboiled Chicken 7
RATLOOP ASIA
Superbly animated and smarter than you'd initially think. Punishing at times!

NEW RECOMMENDED Saints Row 3 9
VOLITION, INC.
Big, brash and unapologetically dumb fun. 'Over the top' doesn't come close.

RECOMMENDED Scott Pilgrim vs. the World 7
UBISOFT
Distinctly old-school and charming but you need three mates and a lot of patience.

RECOMMENDED SOCOM: Special Forces 8
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
Great online with Move and a Sharp Shooter, though solo ain't that special.

Time Crisis: Razing Storm 6
NAMCO BANDAI
Simple, short light gun fare. Ignore the new first-person shooter mode, it's awful.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 8
RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT
A tense, realistic shooter. Cool gadgets.

Transformers: Dark of the Moon 5
HIGH MOON STUDIOS
A near brainless movie tie-in with little merit.

Transformers: War for Cybertron 7
HIGH MOON STUDIOS
Good multiplayer, and that's about it.

RECOMMENDED Vanquish 8
PLATINUM GAMES
Whip quick third-person thrills. Play it now.

Wanted: Weapons of Fate 5
GRIN
Designed only to appeal to mentally-subnormal 11-year-olds.

RECOMMENDED Warhawk 9
INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT / SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO
Furiously addictive. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night.

WET 8
A2M
Tonnes of grindhouse style, little substance. We doubt you'd bother with it now.

Wheelman 6
MIDWAY STUDIOS - NEWCASTLE / TIGON STUDIOS
Rubbish. Underdone throughout.

ACTION-ADVENTURE

3D Dot Game Heroes 7
FROM SOFTWARE
If you pine for the past you'll feel like this was made just for you

Alice: Madness Returns 7
SPICY HORSE
Marries great ideas with average platforming.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed 10
UBISOFT MONTREAL
A landmark title that's dated now.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed II 9
UBISOFT MONTREAL
When everything gels correctly it casually murders its predecessor.

ESSENTIAL Assassin's Creed Brotherhood 10
UBISOFT MONTREAL
The pinnacle of the series so far and the multiplayer is outstanding.

NEW RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed Revelations 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
A safe but solid title that feels more like a (really big) expansion than a true sequel.

RECOMMENDED Batman: Arkham Asylum 8
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
Really delivers the goods, and even though the sequel's out you need this too.

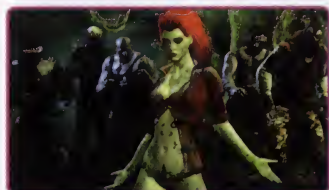
Best trophies



Videogames are a product of culture, be it other games, movies, TV shows and internet memes. Some are obvious, some are squirrelled away as trophies or in-game achievements. *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* rewards alarm-dodging players with a gold trophy 'Foxiest of the Hounds', while Gearbox's evergreen *Borderlands* shows its hand with trophies 'Pandora-dog Millionaire' (earn \$1,000,000) and, our favourite, '1.21 Gigawatts' (shock 25 enemies).

CoD-blimey

Call of Duty is an industry juggernaut, and for three consecutive releases has demolished industry records, making itself (in its own words) the 'biggest entertainment launch in history'. *Modern Warfare 2* sold US\$550 million of stock, *Black Ops* US\$650 million and *Modern Warfare 3* smashed them with US\$775 million. According to Activision's stats, enough people play *CoD* multiplayer every day to fill up the 80 largest sports stadiums in the world.

**Batman: Arkham City** 10

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. PLAYERS: 1

"Everyone else needs to take note: this is how a superhero game should make you feel. It's endlessly creative, perfectly moody and technically flawless."

RECOMMENDED *Brütal Legend* 9

DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS

Must play. If God gave rock 'n' roll to us then it's settled: Tim Schafer is God.

RECOMMENDED *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* 9

MERCURY STEAM

A truly solid romp with tasty combat. Patrick Stewart's narration makes it great.

Clash of the Titans 4

GAME REPUBLIC

A piss-poor action game lacking in every way.

RECOMMENDED *Dante's Inferno* 8

VISCERAL GAMES

Derivative but well-produced and good fun.

RECOMMENDED *Darksiders* 8

VIGIL GAMES

Teeth-grittingly testing but ultimately sound.

RECOMMENDED *Dead Island* 8

TECHLAND

Bogus script and occasionally ugly but undeniably fun. Bound to be a cult hit.

RECOMMENDED *Dead Space* 9

EA REDWOOD SHORES

Super tense. The future of survival horror.

RECOMMENDED *Dead Space 2* 9

VISCERAL GAMES

What it loses in isolation it makes up for in storytelling. Still scary.

Demon's Souls 7

FROM SOFTWARE

Those looking for an extreme challenge might have met their match.

RECOMMENDED *Enslaved* 8

NINJA THEORY

A fun platforming romp based on the same classic story as TV's *Monkey* was.

Fairytale Fights 7

PLAYLOGIC GAME FACTORY

Quirky and sadistic but too simplistic.

Folklore 8

GAME REPUBLIC

Original and surprising with moments of genius.

The Godfather: The Don's Edition 6

EA REDWOOD SHORES

It made for a fun PS2 game but skip this port.

The Godfather II 6

EA REDWOOD SHORES

Starts as a decent crime caper but alienates fans of the film. Play *Mafia II* instead.

ESSENTIAL *God of War III* 10

SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO

A showcase. Old-fashioned arse-kicking, astonishing visuals.

RECOMMENDED *God of War Collection* 9

SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO/BLUEPOINT GAMES

Age has not diminished its impact. A must-get.

RECOMMENDED *God of War Collection Volume II* 8

READY AT DAWN

Two of the best PSP games now on your PS3. Meticulously updated and pretty to look at.

ESSENTIAL *Grand Theft Auto IV* 10

ROCKSTAR NORTH

The technical scope and scale of *GTA IV* dwarfs all. Remarkable.

ESSENTIAL *Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City* 9

ROCKSTAR NORTH

Two new single-player campaigns, expanded multiplayer and a vast array of new weapons and vehicles. Explosive shotgun? Yes please.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince 6

EA BRIGHT LIGHT STUDIO

Play the first 30 minutes and you've played the whole game.

Heavenly Sword

NINJA THEORY

Long in the tooth but still looks slick.

RECOMMENDED *inFAMOUS* 9

SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS

A superpowered take on the urban crime-fighting sandbox. Get this and the sequel.

RECOMMENDED *inFAMOUS 2* 9

SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS

Bigger and better, and the level editor is solid.

LEGO Batman 7

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Faithful, but the formula is getting a bit old.

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 7

TRAVELLER'S TALES

The most thorough LEGO universe yet but it is getting a bit samey.

NEW *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7* 7

TRAVELLER'S TALES

As per above. You'd have to be a fan.

RECOMMENDED *LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures* 9

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Happiness and wonder overcame us with this joyous adaptation.

LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean 7

TRAVELLER'S TALES

You should know from the title if you'd like this or not. It is what it is, and it's okay.

LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars 8

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Bum subject, excellent lightsaber action. Kids should adore it.

Lost: Via Domus 6

UBISOFT MONTREAL

Some solid adventuring, but the voice acting is rubbish.

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom 7

GAME REPUBLIC

A feel-good romp that's a little old-fashioned. If you can find it cheap grab it for a rainy day.

RECOMMENDED *Mafia II* 8

2K CZECH

Its attention to detail, presentation and sound is to be admired.

ESSENTIAL *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* 10

KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS

Yes, it's as much a movie as it is a game but the production values are insane. Epic.

Overlord II 8

TRIUMPH STUDIOS

Refined gameplay and more jokes but control quirks persist.

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End 6

EUROCOM

Looks the part but unfortunately it doesn't feel or play the part.

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands 8

UBISOFT MONTREAL

Harks back to the original Prince and worth your time if you can find it cheap, but only just.

RECOMMENDED *Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time* 9

INSOMNIAC GAMES

Reinvigorates the genre without reinventing the wheel.

RECOMMENDED *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* 8

INSOMNIAC GAMES

A big, wild, good ol' fashioned adventure.

**Red Dead Redemption** 10

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR PLAYERS: 1-16

"A sweeping epic that's among the best games we've ever played and better than *GTA IV* in a lot of crucial areas. Also, the zombie-themed *Undead Nightmare* DLC is totally boss. Grab the Game of the Year edition for max value."

RECOMMENDED *Resident Evil 4* 8

CAPCOM

A straight port. You've played this already.

RECOMMENDED *Resident Evil 5* 9

CAPCOM

A grand, bloody adventure but the inventory system remains bad.

RECOMMENDED *The Saboteur* 8

PANDEMIC STUDIOS

Charming and packed with action. Great, unique visual style.

Shadows of the Damned 7

GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE

Full of dick jokes and so-so gameplay from two geniuses of design. Pity.

Silent Hill Homecoming 6

DOUBLE HELIX GAMES

New combat system is good, but lacks the cerebral chills.

Sonic the Hedgehog 4

SONIC TEAM

There are cheaper ways to get a spare Blu-ray case.

Sonic Unleashed 6

SONIC TEAM

3D adventuring that betrays the character.

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions 5

BEENOX

Looks great – but why have we gone back to swinging from invisible hooks in the sky?

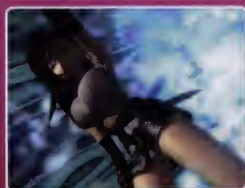
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II 6

LUCASARTS

Earns a point-and-a-bit for every hour that it is long. Technically superior but still rough.



THE BEST PSone CLASSICS ON PlayStation®Store

**FINAL FANTASY VII**

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

PLAYERS: 1

The RPG upon which all other RPGs are generally judged, *Final Fantasy VII* is a modern classic and a worthy part of every credible videogame library.

**DRIVER**

DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS

INTERACTIVE PLAYERS: 1

The original *Driver* hit PlayStation like a blast of fresh air. Hectic car chases through 3D cities may old-hat now but when *Driver* debuted it was like nothing we'd seen.

**CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED**

DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG

PLAYERS: 1

The best platformer on any PlayStation. As far as old-school run and jump action in purpose-built levels goes, *this* is the zenith.

**SYPHON FILTER**

DEVELOPER: EIDETIC

PLAYERS: 1

If you still think *Syphon Filter* was a *MGS* rip-off you're misled. Play it again and tell us this awesome series doesn't deserve a PS3 comeback.

**MEDIEVIL**

DEVELOPER: SCE STUDIO

CAMBRIDGE PLAYERS: 1

Speaking of games that deserve a PS3 comeback, where's Sir Dan? Fantasy hack 'n slash meets the supernatural, *MediEvil* still does it better than most since.



inhouse

FEATURED STUDIO OF THE MONTH

Q-Games

LOCATION: KANSAI, JAPAN FOUNDED: 2001
BEST KNOWN FOR: PIXELJUNK EDEN

Q-Games is unique in the Japanese industry, itself a sector of gaming that was on the cutting edge for a long time before recently coming under intense scrutiny from within its own ranks for not showing enough innovation. What sets this small team apart from its peers is its willingness to deviate from the norm, promoting design by committee rather than bending to the instruction of one person at the top of the chain. Feedback on the progress of their games comes from all directions from within its walls. Its location outside of the fiercely work-driven Tokyo also helps promote their more relaxed attitude.

Dylan Cuthbert, the company's founder and president, is a British expat who runs the studio in Japan, and has worked on the PlayStation brand for over a decade, as well as spending time at Nintendo. Cuthbert was responsible for the 'rubber duck' tech demo on the PS2, while Q-Games itself had a hand in designing the PS3's XMB and also the music visualiser.

This experience tinkering with the PS3 gave them a head start developing games their first in the *PixelJunk* series of games. Where other studios were intent on cultivating 3D games, Q-Games instead started breeding their 2D series.

It's a studio that's continuously focussed on doing things differently, both in the games it produces and also in itself. All the staff at Q-Games speak Japanese to some degree in an effort to promote harmony in the workplace. In an industry that's trying to find inspiration from outside its own comfort zone it's especially helpful having staff that can integrate with one another, and also provide different methodologies for working together. Q-Games prides itself on having employees from different countries and cultures to counterbalance the typical Japanese way of making games. The Japanese industry as a whole is catching on to this method of development; Capcom have partnered with various Western developers over the last few years to varying degrees of success.

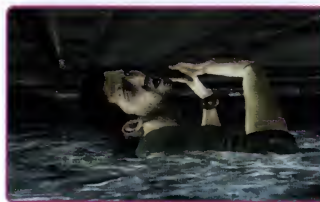
Inspiration and material for games doesn't just occur internally. An indie, husband-and-wife group called Autograph from Kyoto provided the backing music to *PixelJunk Monsters*. The visuals and music for their dream-like platformer, *Eden*, was based on another local artist, Baiyon, who is also providing material for their next project, *PixelJunk 4am*, which utilises Move controls in a music game.

RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's
Splinter Cell: Double Agent
UBISOFT SHANGHAI
Obsessive and gripping, online and off.

Toy Story 3
AVALANCHE SOFTWARE
Cute, simple, and charming as hell.

ESSENTIAL *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* 10
NAUGHTY DOG
It's aged now, but still belongs on your shelf.

ESSENTIAL *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* 10
NAUGHTY DOG
This is the reason Hollywood is so worried about videogames.

**Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception**

DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
PUBLISHER: SCE PLAYERS: 1
"Impeccable in every regard. The action ramps up and up, taking you on foot-chases to teeth-gritting firefights and beyond to stunning set pieces. Totally complements and enhances the other games in the series."

RECOMMENDED *Yakuza 4* 8
CSI TEAM
One for the fans, but it's very refreshing.

ADVENTURE

NEW RECOMMENDED *The Adventures of TinTin: The Secret of the Unicorn* 6
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
Well intentioned but dull. You'll get a kick out of co-op, however.

RECOMMENDED *Back to the Future: The Game Episode 1* 8
TELLTALE GAMES
Fairly simple puzzles but, Great Scott, it looks and feels amazing.

RECOMMENDED *Heavy Rain* 8
QUANTIC DREAM
Not quite a revolution but very clever and very well-crafted.

ESSENTIAL *L.A. Noire* 10
TEAM BOND
Slow paced, laboriously detailed and well-executed.

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust 1
TEAM17 SOFTWARE
An amazing new low for this generation.

RECOMMENDED *Stacking* 8
DOUBLE FINE
A truly unique concept and a real brain tickler.

FIGHTING

Battle Fantasia 7
ARC SYSTEM WORKS
A nice curiosity but, seriously, get *Super Street Fighter IV*.

RECOMMENDED *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift* 9
ARC SYSTEM WORKS
Still wilder, wackier and noisier than anything else on PS3.

NEW *Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi* 7
SPIKE CO. LTD
Grand scale and scope but gets repetitive.

The Fight: Lights Out 5
COLDWOOD INTERACTIVE
The Move controls don't feel as organic as we'd hoped they would. Sorry Danny Trejo.

The King of Fighters XII 3
SNK PLAYMORE
Grey, old and well beyond retirement. Irredeemable.

RECOMMENDED *Mortal Kombat* 8
NETHERREALM
Technically not available in Aus, it's a sterling return to form for the series. Funny, too.

RECOMMENDED *Soulcalibur IV* 8
NAMCO BANDAI
Phenomenal, but will let down those expecting a revolution.

RECOMMENDED *Street Fighter III - Third Strike Online Edition* 9
IRON GALAXY
Very different from IV and utterly brilliant.

ESSENTIAL *Super Street Fighter IV* 10
CAPCOM/DIMPS
Vibrant looking and superb online. Comes with a stack characters, all unlocked. It's the best value version of *SFIV* out there.

Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition 8
CAPCOM
For first time purchasers only. For everyone else there's DLC.

RECOMMENDED *Tekken 6* 8
NAMCO BANDAI
Easy to play, with the biggest roster ever. Feels a bit old, though.

TNA Impact! 6
MIDWAY STUDIOS - LOS ANGELES
Arcade-style biff but needs more content.

NEW RECOMMENDED *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* 8
CAPCOM
Blinding action with a roster you deserve, but still feels like it should've been DLC.

WWE '12 6
YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS
QTE-central with sloppy controls. A major step backwards.

THE BEST PSP GAMES

**GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES**

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR LEEDS
PLAYERS: 1-6
This is about as remarkable as gaming gets on a handheld console. A fully-fledged 3D GTA, just like the PS2 versions, on PSP – and it feels absolutely brilliant. Also? Phil Collins is in it. No, we're totally serious.

**MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM UNITE**

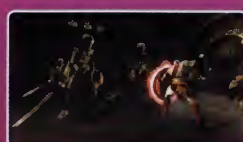
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PLAYERS: 1-4
Monster Hunter is a true system seller in its native Japan and it deserves that sort of awareness here. It's an adventure game to lose your life to, rewarding you in spades if you're able to put the effort in. Even better with mates.

**WIPEOUT PULSE**

DEVELOPER: SCE LIVERPOOL
PLAYERS: 1-8
Beautiful and weighted just right, it's a futurist's wet dream. There's a reason *Wipeout* just works – and this is proof. Depending on which day of the week you ask us this just pips the likes of *Burnout Legends* and *Gran Turismo* for best racing game on PSP.

**METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER**

DEVELOPER: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
PLAYERS: 1-6
A proper, well-produced and thought-out *Metal Gear*; this is a must-have. The story's great and the action is totally addictive. We can't stress it enough: buy this game, and a PSP if you must. This a title that no gamer should miss.

**GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA**

DEVELOPER: READY AT DAWN
PLAYERS: 1
Stupidly better than the already excellent *Chains of Olympus*, this still has fantastic graphics and tighter-than-hades gameplay. If you're a fan of the series, this is a crucial part of the saga you really shouldn't miss.

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 8
YUKE'S
If the soap-drama of the WWE's your thing, welcome to nirvana.

FLIGHT

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon 7
PROJECT ACES
Reality-bending fare that lacks depth.

Air Conflicts: Secrets Wars 4
BITCOMPOSER
Haphazard design, unforgivable mistakes and awful sound make this a true dud.

Apache: Air Assault 7
GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT
Hardcore chopper sim with impressive detail but lacks variety. Good online, though.

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII 7
UBISOFT ROMANIA
A simple aerial blaster. Flawed but fun.

Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII 6
UBISOFT ROMANIA
Solid, varied, but not quite the ace of aces.

Heroes Over Europe 7
TRANSMISSION GAMES
A little rough but not bad. *IL-2* is much better.



IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey 10
DEVELOPER: GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: AFA PLAYERS: 1-16
"Head turning visuals, astonishing attention to detail, brilliant sound effects and stacks of ratta-tat action all combine in this truly surprisingly awesome aerial combat game. To be honest it's the best flight game we've ever played"

Lair 5
FACTOR 5
It feels rushed and unfinished. Deeply disappointing.

RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2 8
UBISOFT ROMANIA
A top gun successor. More detail, better mission design.

MUSIC

AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack 7
HARMONIX
Bare-bones stuff but the music is worth it. Fully exportable.

Band Hero 7
NEVERSOFT
It works but the songs have been censored.

RECOMMENDED The Beatles: Rock Band 9
HARMONIX
Outstanding. This is a tribute like no other.

RECOMMENDED DJ Hero 2 9
FREESTYLEGAMES
Some great improvements and some excellent, unique mixes.

RECOMMENDED Green Day: Rock Band 8
HARMONIX
Very good. Up there with *The Beatles: Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock 9
NEVERSOFT
The last *GH* with a mostly decent soundtrack.

Guitar Hero World Tour 9
NEVERSOFT
Good, but missing crucial elements that make *Rock Band* better.

Guitar Hero 5 7
NEVERSOFT
Improving, but the hipster tracklist is a dud.

RECOMMENDED Guitar Hero: Metallica 8
NEVERSOFT
The best in the series since *Guitar Hero III*.

Guitar Hero: Greatest Hits 7
BEENOX
Great past *GH* tracks with full band support. Seriously though, why wasn't it just DLC?

Guitar Hero: Van Halen 6
UNDERGROUND DEVELOPMENT
Only buy this cheap: \$90 is an insult. USA *GH5* buyers got it as a free bonus.

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock 7
NEVERSOFT
Functional, but it just isn't evolving at the same rate as its peers.

LEGO Rock Band 8
HARMONIX / TRAVELLER'S TALES
Cute. Fewer tracks than we'd like though.

Michael Jackson The Experience 5
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Better with mates but feels cheap.

ESSENTIAL Rock Band 2 10
HARMONIX
The best music game series around.

RECOMMENDED Rock Band 3 9
HARMONIX
Improvements to the interface abound, but it's only as good as your existing DLC library.

NEW RECOMMENDED Rocksmith 8
UBISOFT
More an educational tool than game, but it works really, really well.

SingStar 8
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Will last as long as the PS3 with so much DLC.

PARTY

Ape Escape 4
JAPAN STUDIO
A serious misstep. An on-rails shooter where the monkeys run towards you? Pass.

EyePet 7
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Harmless fun but pointless for adults.

Kung Fu Rider 3
JAPAN STUDIO
Waggle-based rubbish. A terrible example of a Move game.

PlayStation Move Heroes 7
NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE
One for underminding kids. Fun but bland.

The Shoot 6
COHORT STUDIOS
A limited Move rail shooter. Cool presentation.

RECOMMENDED Sports Champions 8
ZINDAGI GAMES
Despite a few quirks this is a must-have Move title.

Yoostar 2 7
BLITZ GAME STUDIOS
Imperfect yet hilarious movie karaoke title.

PUZZLE/PLATFORMER

ESSENTIAL Braid 10
HOTHEAD GAMES
Probably the best-ever example of how to implement time-bending physics.

RECOMMENDED Chime 8
ZOE MODE
A music-based puzzler where you need to slot in blocks to rockin' (and chilled) beats.

RECOMMENDED de Blob 2 9
BLUE TONGUE ENTERTAINMENT
Surprisingly fun, fresh and colourful.

RECOMMENDED Flight Control 9
FIREMINT
One of the best Move games ever.

Balloonacy

Snake strapped people to it (or a version of it) in *Peace Walker*, and Batman did it in *The Dark Knight*. We can barely believe it's real. The Fulton Surface to Air Recovery System (STARS) was invented back in the 1950s, and was designed to retrieve people and goods on the ground without the aircraft having to land. Utilising a helium balloon, 150 metres of nylon, a C-130 Hercules class aircraft and a lot of guts, the plane snares the top of rope, whisking the attached cargo up, up and away.



RECOMMENDED Joe Danger 8
HELLO GAMES
A platformer that's also a puzzler with bundles of charm and tough as a boot.

RECOMMENDED Katamari Forever 8
NAMCO BANDAI
Joyfulness, digitally realised, and it'll challenge you too. Infectious.

RECOMMENDED LittleBigPlanet 2 9
MEDIA MOLECULE
Like the original it's innovative and never-ending. Improves upon an amazing product.

RECOMMENDED Outland 9
HOUSEMARQUE
Liberally copies bits from old-school *Castlevania* but it does it well. Very clever.

RECOMMENDED Plants vs. Zombies 9
POPCAP GAMES
Insanely iconic and smart tower defense. A little bit expensive, so get it on sale.

NEW RECOMMENDED Rayman Origins 8
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
One of the most gorgeous games to ever hit the PS3. Great co-op too.

RECOMMENDED The Sly Collection 9
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
A surprisingly fun and fresh bunch of gems.

RECOMMENDED Sonic 4: Episode 1 8
SONIC TEAM
The second best Sonic game in about a decade but as a platformer it's so-so.

Sonic Generations 7
SONIC TEAM
Starts out great and falters towards the end. A stunning homage to everything Sonic

NEW Worms: Crazy Golf 6
TEAM 17
Originally for smartphones, and it hasn't translated well. Fun in micro bursts.

RACING/DRIVING

Blur 7
BIZARRE CREATIONS
A race to power-ups rather than a racer with power-ups.

RECOMMENDED Burnout Paradise 9
CRITERION GAMES
Stunning and sharp but we miss the dedicated Crash Mode.

Colin McRae: Dirt 2 7
CODEMASTERS
Drives fine but it's style over substance here.

NEW RECOMMENDED Daytona USA 8
SEGA
Addictive as ever and arcade perfect.

RECOMMENDED DiRT 3 8
CODEMASTERS
A welcome return to form. Great car roster, awesome handling, incredible sound.

RECOMMENDED Driver: San Francisco 9
REFLECTIONS
The series returns to its roots and delivers superb action-adventure racing in a gorgeous looking package. A must get.

RECOMMENDED F1 2011 9
CODEMASTERS
A tactical and graphical improvement over last year. Even better with a Logitech wheel.

Fuel 4
ASOBO STUDIOS
Huge, but bugged, boring and undercooked. Deserves to be left in the bargain bin.



Gran Turismo 5 9
DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL
PUBLISHER: SONY PLAYERS: 1-16
"*GT5* feels familiar, and is still an RPG masquerading as a racing game. It looks stunning with class-leading lighting effects and exceptionally modelled premium cars, and with a G27 wheel it feels incredible. We just wish that there were some more recent cars."

RECOMMENDED ModNation Racers 9
UNITED FRONT GAMES
An incredible package. Creating is even more fun than racing.

MotoGP 10/11 6
MONUMENTAL GAMES
Dull presentation and crap controls wreck it.

MotorStorm 10
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Fast, hard and dirty. Things have come on a lot since 2007 though.

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift 8
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Boasts split-screen but visually it hasn't come on far enough.

MotorStorm Apocalypse 8
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
The new locale lacks a little charm but the racing is as fast and frantic as ever.

MX vs. ATV Alive 5
RAINBOW STUDIOS
A step backwards for a series that peaked on PS2 and has gotten lamer since.

RECOMMENDED Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 9
CRITERION GAMES
Smooth, compelling and absolutely beautiful arcade racing.

Need For Speed The Run 7
EA BLACK BOX
A sound concept that's tainted by cruddy handling. Get *Hot Pursuit* instead.

Nail'd 7
TECHLAND
Fun knockabout ATV arcade racer.

RECOMMENDED SHIFT 2: Unleashed 9
SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS
Incredible sense of speed, frantic racing and plenty of depth. Features Mount Panorama.

RECOMMENDED Pure 9
BLACK ROCK STUDIOS
One of the best arcade racers on the market.

RECOMMENDED Race Driver: GRID 9
CODEMASTERS
A born-to-rage racing rebel. Good but lacks the *Race Driver* vintage, despite the name.

SBK 2011 7
MILESTONE
Fairly similar to the last one, but with a new Challenge mode and tweaked handling.

NEW RECOMMENDED Skydrift 8
DIGITAL REALITY
Kart racing meets *Ace Combat*. It's fairly short but thrilling.

RECOMMENDED Split/Second 8
BLACK ROCK STUDIO
Doesn't feel as sharp as *Burnout* but it's a true challenger.

SuperCar Challenge 7
EUTECHNYX
Admirable effort but feels a little bland.

Test Drive Unlimited 2 7
EDEN GAMES
Massive and ambitious but the cars handle like go-karts in glue. Second-rate visuals, too.

RECOMMENDED WRC 2 8
MILESTONE
Better than last year's but still roughly shod together. The only 'proper' rally out there.

RPG/ACTION RPG

Alpha Protocol 5
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
Great concept, poor execution. Also? Worst male lead ever.

Ar tonelico Qoga: Knell of Ar Ciel 7
GUST
Defiantly old-school JRPG. One for the fans.

The Baconing 6
HOTHEAD GAMES
Butchered co-op and crushing difficulty spikes sour the experience.

NEW RECOMMENDED Disgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten 8
NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE
Very familiar for fans but still exciting.

DC Universe Online 7
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
Pretty but shallow. It's now free to play online.

RECOMMENDED Dark Souls 8
FROM SOFTWARE
Brutally, stupidly, gloriously hard.

Dungeon Siege III 6
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
Sluggish combat and an arse-backwards upgrade system. Quite pretty, though.

RECOMMENDED Dragon Age: Origins 9
BIOWARE
As long as it is enthralling. Essential for patient fantasy freaks.

RECOMMENDED Dragon Age II 8
BIOWARE
Accessible but lacks immersion. One step forward and two steps back from *Origins*.

ESSENTIAL The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion 10
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
Simply put: awesome.



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim 10
DEVELOPER: BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
DISTRIBUTOR: PLAYERS: 1
"Book holidays, leave your other half and ask someone to take care of your dog; you will need 300+ hours to discover everything this offers, from the varied combat options to the mind-blowing amount of quests. The world is huge. It demands your attention. Give in to it absolutely."

Getting a good rap

Question: what do hip-hop artists Wu-Tang Clan, 50 Cent and Snoop Dogg all have in common? 10 points to you if you answered that they'd all starred in videogames. All nine of the Wu-Tang Clan appeared in the PSone title *Wu-Tang: Taste the Pain*, and some were cast in *Def Jam Vendetta*, *Def Jam Fight For NY* and *Def Jam: Icon*. 50 Cent had a turn in *50 Cent: Bulletproof* (tripe) and *Blood on the Sand* (not bad), while Snoop was a character in *True Crime: Streets of LA*.



Hyperdimension Neptunia 8
IDEA FACTORY
A pastiche on modern videogames. Very, very weird JRPG with neat attack strategies.

ESSENTIAL Fallout 3 10
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
It's *Oblivion* in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and it's utterly brilliant.

RECOMMENDED Fallout: New Vegas 8
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
A great ride but you've been on it before.

RECOMMENDED Final Fantasy XIII 8
SQUARE ENIX
Spellbinding graphics and 50+ hours of action but missing a little magic.

NEW The Lord of the Rings: War in the North 7
SNOWBLIND STUDIOS
Satisfying but repetitive combat. Best with two *Rings* fans going at it in three-player co-op.

ESSENTIAL Mass Effect 2 10
BIOWARE
Astonishingly rich combat-driven sci-fi. An action RPG without peer.

Resonance of Fate 6
TRI-ACE
Deep, but also wordy, clunky and ugly.

Valkyria Chronicles 8
SEGA WDW
Strategy/RPG heads should not miss this.

White Knight Chronicles II 7
LEVEL 5/JAPAN STUDIO
A JRPG for those who like to grind.

SHOOTER

RECOMMENDED Aliens vs. Predator 9
REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
One of the best movie-inspired titles ever.

NEW RECOMMENDED Battlefield 3 8
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Single player blows, multiplayer's awesome. Get a team together and own the PSN.

RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company 8
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Better single player campaign than its sequel.

RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company 2 8
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A top-tier shooter with a deeply dedicated online community, but the single-player mischief of the original is M.I.A.

RECOMMENDED BioShock 8
IRRATIONAL GAMES / 2K MARIN
Grown-up gaming at its best.

RECOMMENDED BioShock 2 9
2K MARIN / DIGITALEXTREMES / 2KAUSTRALIA
Doesn't match the original's plot but the combat has been spliced to near-perfection.

Bodycount 3
CODEMASTERS
Fundamentally broken and largely pointless.

ESSENTIAL Borderlands 9
GEARBOX SOFTWARE
This starts out great and only gets better.

RECOMMENDED Brother's in Arms: Hell's Highway 8
GEARBOX SOFTWARE
The most authentic WWII shooter ever made..

Brink 7
SPLASH DAMAGE
Runs a good online race. Faceplants as a solo experience.

Bulletstorm 7
PEOPLE CAN FLY
Inventive but saves the best stuff for the final couple of hours. Graphically struggles, too.

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 10
INFINITY WARD
It's still relentlessly exciting.

ESSENTIAL Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 10
INFINITY WARD
Like three games stuffed into one. We still love the co-op Spec Ops mode.

NEW RECOMMENDED Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 9
INFINITY WARD
It realised the threat presented by *Battlefield 3* and sees it off. Refined and addictive.

RECOMMENDED Call of Duty: Black Ops 9
TREYARCH
A generous package with great solo and online play. The presentation's excellent too.

ESSENTIAL Call of Duty: World at War 10
TREYARCH
War at its worst (and best). Proof you can make a great WWII game set (partially) in the Pacific. Plus, Nazi Zombies.

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood 7
TECHLAND
A cinematic and action-packed Western shooter that's better than you probably think.

Call of Juarez: The Cartel 4
TECHLAND
Hackneyed ideas with AI from the last century. Dopey multiplayer, too.

RECOMMENDED The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena 8
STARBREEZE STUDIOS / TIGON STUDIOS
Moody and fresh. A must play. You don't need to know the movies to enjoy it either.

Condemned 2: Bloodshot 9
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
Gripping stuff. We were blown away. Shame the original isn't on PS3.

RECOMMENDED Crysis 8
CRYTEK
Forget it's from 2007 and realise it's stellar. Comes close to shaming the sequel.

RECOMMENDED Crysis 2 9
CRYTEK
Diabolically pretty and challenging, and a welcome reprieve from corridor shooters.

RECOMMENDED The Darkness 9
STARBREEZE STUDIOS
Stunning, original and gory as hell. Hopefully the sequel rocks this hard.

RECOMMENDED Deus Ex: Human Revolution 8
EIDOS MONTREAL
A flawed masterpiece that doesn't offer quite as much choice as you'd like.

F.E.A.R. 8
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS / DAY 1 STUDIOS
A chilling ride, but a bit ugly now.

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin 7
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
An above-average shooter suffering from a lack of imagination.

F.E.A.R. 3 6
DAY 1 STUDIOS
Capable but unspectacular. Also, not scary. Better in co-op.

RECOMMENDED Far Cry 2 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
A technical open-world bell-ringer but the travel time will grate.

NEW RECOMMENDED GoldenEye 007: Reloaded 8
EUROCOM
A lot of fun, though it's probably lost amongst the glut of other top-tier games.

Haze 6
FREE RADICAL DESIGN
Patchy visuals, tragic level design and dismal AI.

Homefront 8
KAOS STUDIOS
Polished but blink-and-you'll-miss-it single player. A fine alternative to *CoD* multi, though.

ESSENTIAL Killzone 2 10
GUERRILLA GAMES
Lives up to the hype with hectic action.

RECOMMENDED Killzone 3 9
GUERRILLA GAMES
Epic firefights and an engrossing storyline.

RECOMMENDED Medal of Honor 8
DANGER CLOSE / DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Not sexy but it's a gritty, realistic shooter with great atmosphere.

RECOMMENDED Mirror's Edge 8
EA DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A true original that makes some grand leaps in design.

RECOMMENDED Operation Flashpoint: Red River 8
CODEMASTERS
A massive improvement on its predecessor. Fun solo, but co-op over the PSN is awesome.

RECOMMENDED The Orange Box 9
EA UK / VALVE
Get it for *Portal*, keep it for *Half-Life 2*.

RECOMMENDED Portal 2 9
VALVE
One of the most brilliant games ever. You'll hold it dear for many years to come, and the split-screen co-op is wicked.

RAGE 7
ID
Holds promise but struggles in many regards. We hope they make a sequel, and make it what this should have been.

RECOMMENDED Resistance: Fall of Man 10
INSOMNIAC GAMES
A fantastic launch title with sweet weapons.

RECOMMENDED Resistance 2 9
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Fast, furious and stuffed with action.

RECOMMENDED Resistance 3 8
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Derivative action but effortlessly compelling. A grand finale, nonetheless.

Rogue Warrior 3
ZOMBIE STUDIOS / REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
A fiasco. We tried to like it but it's too short and too terrible.

Singularity 7
RAVEN SOFTWARE
Had potential but wasn't quite worth the wait.

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 5
CITY INTERACTIVE
The novelty will be enough for sniper fans. Everyone else should wait for the sequel.

TimeShift 6
SABER INTERACTIVE
A sterling attempt that doesn't quite reach 88 miles per hour.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 7
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Not as good or as cool as the first one.

Turning Point: Fall of Liberty 4
SPARK UNLIMITED
Scrappy throughout. Great concept, bogus execution.

SPORTS

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa 7
EA CANADA
FIFA 10 with a World Cup facelift. A bit pricey.

AFL Live 6
BIG ANT
Does a decent job of things and it's better than *Rugby League Live*.

Backbreaker 7
NATURALMOTION
Great tech. Worth a look to see euphoria at work in a sports game.

EA Sports MMA 7
EA TIBURON
Great controls but struggles to be convincing.



FIFA 12 8
DEVELOPER: EA CANADA
PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-22

"It's much more technical to get to grips with than *FIFA 11*. Hardcore fans will love it, though those approaching the series with relatively fresh eyes will scratch their heads for a while. Online, though, it's without peer: you could easily lose your life to this belter of a game until next year's update."

RECOMMENDED Fight Night Champion 9
EA CANADA
Refined controls, excellent story mode and super-quick gameplay. Near perfect.

International Cricket 2010 7
TRICKSTAR GAMES
Not the most comprehensive cricket game but certainly the best when you're on the pitch.

John Daly's ProStroke Golf 5
GUSTO GAMES
Those looking for a high production value golf game should give this the shaft.

RECOMMENDED NBA 2K12 9
VISUAL CONCEPTS
The best basketball game ever. Fans of the sport should buy this immediately.

RECOMMENDED NBA Jam: On Fire Edition 8
EA CANADA
Loads of fun. For \$20 you're mad not to get it.

RECOMMENDED Pro Evolution Soccer 2012 8
KCET TOKYO
Hi-octane action (yes, for a football game). It's actually a lot of fun, but it's no *FIFA*.

Rugby League Live 5
BIG ANT
Not as complete a game as the last one on PS2 and the whack team ratings frustrate.

Rugby World Cup 2011 4
HB STUDIOS
Near disastrous and fairly pointless. No Wallabies, no All Blacks.

Shaun White Skateboarding 6
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Kudos for the quirky touches but the skating itself is pretty bland.

Shaun White Snowboarding 6
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Lacks the fine touch of realism or the excitement of lunacy.

Skate 9
EA BLACK BOX
A well-balanced masterpiece and true Tony Hawk killer. Trumped by its sequels.

RECOMMENDED Skate 2 9
EA BLACK BOX
One of the greatest sports games ever conceived. Flawless controls are married with a dense city that's packed with natural lines.

RECOMMENDED Skate 3 8
EA BLACK BOX
Better in many ways, although the city isn't as cool as *Skate 2*.

RECOMMENDED Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12 8
EA TIBURON
Great golf game but we don't like the way the day one DLC is teased via the career mode.

Tony Hawk's Project 8 7
NEVERSOFT
No real reason to revisit this post-*Skate* at all.

Tony Hawk: RIDE 4
ROBOMODO
Pure frustration made plastic.

RECOMMENDED Top Spin 4 8
2K CZECH
More accessible than its predecessor with a DualShock, as the Move controls are spotty.

RECOMMENDED UFC Undisputed 2010 8
YUKE'S
The new undisputed baron of sports fighting.

Vancouver 2010 6
EUROCOM
A handful of events that last one afternoon.

RECOMMENDED Virtua Tennis 4 8
SUMO DIGITAL
Superb Move controls and supremely pretty.

STRATEGY

RECOMMENDED Civilization Revolution 8
FIRAXIS GAMES
Great fun and shockingly addictive.

RECOMMENDED From Dust 9
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
Creative and engaging. Surprisingly likable.

RECOMMENDED R.U.S.E. 8
EUGEN SYSTEMS
Niche but supremely well-crafted strategy. Better with Move, too.

The Sims 3 7
THE SIMS STUDIO
Waiting to pounce on the right type of gamer.

Stormrise 4
THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
A cack-handed, future war mess.

On the edge

Although *Brink* was slightly disappointing, it represented the spirit of parkour in an interesting way. Parkour, or free running, isn't a sport but rather the way of transitioning from point A to point B in the most efficient way possible. Other fine videogame examples are the under-loved *Mirror's Edge*, and the generally excellent *Assassin's Creed* series. Also, see if you can track down the French documentary *Génération Yamakasi* for some exceptional insights into the movement.

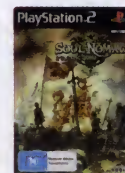


infamous

REVISITING PLAYSTATION CLASSICS

2007:
SOUL NOMAD & THE
WORLD EATERS

CONSOLE: PS2 GENRE: STRATEGY-RPG DEVELOPER: NIPPON ICHI
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: JAPAN CURRENT APPROXIMATE PRICE: \$50 (EBAY - IF YOU CAN FIND IT. NTSC COPIES ARE MORE COMMON)



Nippon Ichi love to make spectacularly odd strategy-RPGs. They just love it. It's very nearly the only thing they know how to do. They're like the id Software of turn-based tumult for the consoles, having picked up where Konami and Square left off with their ever-persistent (and now flagship) *Disgaea* series back in '03. *Phantom Brave* soon followed, as did *Makai Kingdom*, as did *La Pucelle: Tactics*... you get the picture. Nippon Ichi heart being slow and weird.

As niche as their titles can be, the last one to arrive for the departing PS2 was the most niche of them all – in so far as its PAL pressing was so limited almost none of the local gaming press received a copy, let alone the blissfully unaware public. *Soul Nomad & the World Eaters* was Nippon Ichi's silent swan-song to their sixth generation warhorse of choice, and like Level-5's *Rogue Galaxy*, it had the misfortune to wave goodbye at a time when everyone was well and truly exploring the new horizons afforded by the PS3.

It's a shame, because it's awesome. It also does things a little differently. Make no mistake, though: it doesn't break from Nippon Ichi's ultra-Japanese tradition of bizarre anime characters, outlandish Engrish and unrealistically huge numerical values. Breathe easy. Those are still present and accounted for. In fact, you might even say all that stuff's better (better-worse?) here than it's ever been.

You start the game innocuously enough as a guy or gal (this is one of

the only times Nippon Ichi have done the whole no-talk protagonist thing) living in the reality-shunning Hidden Village. It doesn't take long for you to come into possession of the black sword, though. Rule of thumb: black swords are almost never good. This one contains the malevolent shade of Gig, an all-powerful smartarse who bonds with your innards and lends you his mondo powers. You'll need 'em, too. Tomorrow, you're off to fight the World Eaters.

And fight them you do, but overusing Gig's tremendous abilities means he'll eventually take over your body and be born anew to totally wreck the earth you're trying to save. Can't have that. Instead, you must groom up to 9 squads, each containing between 1-9 characters on 3x3 grid. While different troop types up to your main character's level can be purchased at any time (provided you've unlocked them), the clincher here is the "room" you put them in. The rooms decide how many characters can be in the squad and what – if any – special effect that squad might get. It's an artful system, and although luck often plays a part in deciding what rooms you receive, you'll forever be tweaking and upgrading and flat-out freaking out over them.

Pedantic commanders will have an aneurysm, especially considering the fact that, when the game's over, it's not really over. You serious? *Soul Nomad & the World Eater's* New Game+ is typically hardcore – and the fact there's an alternate storyline in complete opposition to the canon you just finished up with means that this is also one of the lengthiest SRPGs you've never played.

WALK THE DEMON PATH

The first time you play, you're playing the Normal Path. Finishing it with a female lead character is considered canon, a fact that *Disgaea 3* even references. The second time around, you can actively choose to hand over full control of your faculties and become Gig, thus starting down the Demon Path as the Devourlord. The storyline turns itself on its head, inexplicably going on to encompass atrocities such as rape and genocide. Those wacky Japanese, eh.

Next month

COP THIS! ►

Max Payne 3

We dig through Rockstar's latest shooter. You'd better believe it's bullet time!

PLUS

Prototype 2

Mass Effect 3

The Darkness II

Binary Domain

Far Cry 3

Tomb Raider

Rainbow 6

Patriots

and much more!

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FEBRUARY 2012

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